

MURDERED-YET ALIVE *by* JEP POWELL

fantastic

ADVENTURES

Edgar Rice Burroughs'

NEWEST NOVEL

GODDESS OF FIRE



JULY 20c

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*but not half so
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Fantastic

ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3
NO. 5

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VOLUME 3,
Number 5

The Memory of an Atom



Can The Past
Be Awakened--

--and THE PURPOSE OF
OUR LIVES KNOWN?

WERE THE ANCIENTS RIGHT? Does the whirling heart of an atom contain the secret of the universe? If everything from a grain of sand to the mighty stars—including man—is composed of atoms, do these particles contain the *infinite intelligence* which ordained and directs all things? Shall man at last find within them his true purpose in the scheme of things?

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ONE of our readers suggested that our artists collaborate on a cover. Well, that's exactly what was done on this month's cover, illustrating "Goddess of Fire," Edgar Rice Burroughs' latest "Carson of Venus" yarn.

The cover itself was painted by J. Allen St. John, and then the now famous Mac Girl was added to it by the popular H. W. McCauley. The result, in the opinion of your editors, is as lovely a cover as the fantasy field has ever seen. We know you'll like it. As for ourselves, we will frame this one and hang it in our office for the admiration of future visitors. If you ever drop in, you'll see it there, which is by way of an invitation. If vacation brings you into Chicago, drop in on us!

THERE'S a bit of a story behind this issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. It has to do with Edgar Rice Burroughs and Ralph Milne Farley. They both appear with stories. And that's where the story inside a story comes in!

Long ago, working without knowledge of each other, these two writers wrote a story about an "inner world" inside the Earth. Both of those manuscripts reached the desk of the editor of a weird magazine on the same day.

That editor couldn't buy either of the stories, but he recommended another market to both. The final result was publication of both stories by that other market, but *six years apart*! And it was Burroughs who beat Farley to the punch, by a quirk of fate.

So you see what strange consequences can come of a mere coincidence. Burroughs, because he had first publication, wrote a series of inner world stories. If Farley had been first, the series would have been his.

Which reminds us that a new series of Pellucidar stories will appear in *Amazing Stories*, our com-

panion magazine beginning with the December issue—which is a long way to forecast, but then, Burroughs is worth waiting for!

WE introduce to our pages this month a new writer to fantasy fiction. He is Robert Leslie Bellem, who is not unknown in the writing world, having penned some of the finest south-sea, adventure, and detective fiction that has appeared in recent years. We know that his addition to our little family will bring some very fine stories to you in the near future. Just keep your eye peeled for his name. It means "here's a good story!" Incidentally, his autobiography is on page 136 of this issue.

REMEMBER Nat Schachner? You ought to, because he was one of the names that popularized fantasy fiction from its early days. He's quite a big-shot writer these days, but he's come back to fantasy with a swell novel, complete in one issue, in the August issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. It's "The Return of Circe" and it's 30,000 words of the finest story you ever read, we guarantee it. Also, it is featured by a new Mac Girl cover by you know who! Which is reason enough to be on the dot when the issue hits the stands on June 21! Don't say we didn't tell you about it! It's a "must" story if there ever was one.

BUT maybe the big news of the August issue is a new contest, the finest we've ever run. It is based around a story called "Problem On Mars" by Duncan Farnsworth . . . and wow, is it a problem! It'll make you pounce on your pencil and scratchpad and dope out a way to nail \$50.00 in easy money! By all means, get in on this one—it's the berries! No complicated letter to write, no story to finish. Just answer one simple question!

(Concluded on page 124)



"How can you be so indifferent, Branda? It's more than metal and oil can stand."

about it! It's a "must" story if there ever was one.

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These warriors fought with spears—more deadly than I had imagined.

GODDESS OF FIRE

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

How could this Venus girl, so beautiful other women seemed as beasts, remember Brooklyn? She could never have seen or known it—and yet. . .

“SAFE!” breathed Duare. “Safe at last!” She nestled closer to me in the seat of the little plane as we hurtled along through the Venusian skyplanes beneath the eternal cloud blankets.

Safe! That word has its nuances. Safety is relative. In relation to her immediate past, Duare was quite safe; but we were still thousands of miles from Korva, with only a very hazy idea of the direction of our goal.

We had enough concentrated fuel to fly the ship for, probably, some fifty years; but we would have to make occasional landings for food and water, and it seemed as though every time we landed something terrible happened to us.

But that is Venus. If you had a forced landing in Kansas or Maine or Oregon, the only thing you’d have to worry about would be the landing; but when you set a ship down in Venus, you never know what you’re going to run up against.

It might be kloonobargan, the hairy, man-eating savages; or a tharban, that most frightful of lion-like carnivores; or a basto, a huge, omnivorous beast that bears some slight resemblance to the American bison; or, perhaps worst of all, ordinary human beings like your-

self, but with a low evaluation of life—that is, your life.

But I was not so much troubled by consideration of these possibilities as I was of the fate of Kandar and Artol. They were splendid fellows, and I hated to think of their having to remain slaves in Mypos.

Duare had evidently been watching my face, for she said:

“What is troubling you, Carson? You look worried.”

“I was thinking of Kandar and Artol,” I replied. “We had hoped to escape together.”

“Who is Artol?” she asked. “I do not recall a slave by that name.”

“I met him after I was taken to Tyros’ palace,” I explained. “He was a warrior in the body guard of Jantor, jong of Japal—Kandar’s father, you know.”

“We should help them to escape, if we can,” said Duare.

“I can’t risk your safety again,” I said.

“They are your friends,” she said. “We cannot abandon them without making an effort to save them.” That was like Duare.

“Well,” I said, “we might fly over the city and see what can be done about it. I have a plan. Perhaps it will work,

and perhaps it won't. That will depend more upon Kandar and Artol than on us. Take the controls a minute."

As she flew the ship, circling back toward Mypos,* I found writing materials in one of the storage compartments; and wrote a note to Kandar. I showed it to Duare, and after she had read it, she nodded her approval.

"We can do our part easily enough," she said; "I hope they can do theirs."

I tied the note to a spare bolt, and took the controls. We were now about a thousand feet above Mypos, and I started a wide spiral down toward the city, aiming at Tyros' palace.

As we got closer, I could see people staring up at us from the streets and from the palace grounds; and I could see others scurrying for safety. Of course none of them had ever seen an aeroplane before, for our anotar is the only one in Venus—as far as I know;

at least none of them had seen one except the Mypos warriors who had captured us. Of course they had told every one about it, but nobody believed them.

I HEADED for the slave compound in the palace grounds, flying very low and looking for Kandar or Artol. At last I recognized them both; they were standing together, looking up at us. Although I had told Kandar all about the anotar, he looked now as though he couldn't even believe his eyes.

As I circled again, some of Tyros' warriors ran into the compound and commenced to hurl spears at us—the three pronged tridents with which they are armed. As far as we were concerned they were quite harmless; but they fell back among themselves; and after one impaled a warrior, they desisted.

* Permanently etched on the golden plates of memory is my first meeting with Carson Napier. He had come to my office at Tarzana to enlist my co-operation in recording his projected voyage to Mars in the giant rocket ship he had built on Guadalupe Island off the west coast of Lower California.

He told me briefly something of his background. I believe that I can almost recall his exact words. They will explain how it has been possible for him to narrate his remarkable adventures to me.

"To get the whole picture clearly before you," he commenced, "I shall have to tell you something about myself. My father was a British army officer, my mother an American girl from Virginia. I was born in India while my father was stationed there, and brought up under the tutorage of an old Hindu who was much attached to my father and mother. This Chand Kahi was something of a mystic, and he taught me many things that are not in the curriculums of schools for boys under ten.

"Among these things was telepathy, which he had cultivated to such a degree that he could converse with one in psychological harmony with him quite as easily at great distances as when face to face. Not only that, but he could project mental images to great distances, so that the recipient of his thought waves could see what Chand Kahi was seeing, or whatever else Chand Kahi wished him to see. These things he taught me."

Having discovered by an ingenious test that

my mind was attuned to his, Carson Napier asked me to receive and record the story of his flight to Mars and his adventures on the Red Planet.

His failure to reach Mars and his landing on Venus instead, through an amazing miscalculation, are matters of history now, as are his many adventures on the Shepherd Star.

You have read of his winning of Duare, the sacrosanct daughter of a king; of his adoption by Taman, Jong of Korva; of his rescue of Duare from the clutches of her father; and of how, as they were attempting to return to Korva in the aeroplane Carson had built, the Sun had hurst through the two cloud envelopes which surround Venus and the ensuing storm had carried them thousands of miles into a strange country.

Here in Mypos, they had become prisoners and slaves of Tyros, the jong, ruler of a race of web-footed humans, the gilled heads of whom resembled the heads of fishes. (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, March, 1941; "Slaves of the Fish Men.")

While in Mypos, Carson had formed friendships with two other slaves, citizens of Japal, a nearby country: Kandar, son of the jong of Japal, and Artol, a common warrior from the same country.

Barely escaping with their lives from the palace of Tyros, Carson and Duare found their plane safe in the shelter of a wood where they had had to abandon it when they were captured; and it was with feelings of immeasurable relief that they took off and soared above the strange landscape that is typical of Venus.—E.R.B.

I didn't want the warriors in the compound; because I didn't wish them to see me drop the note to Kandar. But how to get rid of them? Finally I hit upon a plan. The only trouble was that it might chase Kandar out of the compound, too; but I could only try it.

I zoomed to a thousand feet, and then banked and dove for the compound. You should have seen slaves and warriors scurry for safety! But Kandar and Artol never moved from their tracks. If the compound had only been a little longer and there had been no pool in it, I could have landed and taken off again with Kandar and Artol before the terrified warriors could have been aware of what I was doing.

Duare gave a little gasp as I flattened out and just missed the cornice of one of the palace buildings by a hair; then I banked again and came back. This time I dropped the note at Kandar's feet; then I rose and circled back low over the compound. I saw Kandar pick up the note and read it. Immediately he raised his left hand above his head. That was the signal I had written him to give if he would make the attempt to escape that I had suggested. Before I flew away, I saw him destroy the note.

I rose high and went inland. I wanted the Myposans to think that we had gone away for good. After we were out of sight of the city, I turned north and gradually circled back toward the lake on which Mypos is situated. Still well out of sight of the city I found a secluded cove, and made a landing a short distance off shore. Here we waited until after dark.

It was very peaceful on the waters of that little cove. We were not even threatened by any of the fearsome creatures which swarm the lakes and seas of Venus. In fact, none came near us. Our only discomfort was hunger. We could see fruits and nuts and berries

growing on shore, but we could also see kloonobargan watching us from behind trees and bushes. Fortunately, we were on a fresh-water lake; so we did not suffer from thirst; and we were so happy to be together again and so contented to be temporarily safe that we did not notice the lack of food particularly.

After dark*, we took off again, heading for Mypos. The motor of our anotar is noiseless; so I didn't anticipate being discovered. I took to the water about a mile above the city and taxied slowly toward it, avoiding the galleys anchored in the roadstead off the city.

WE came at last to a point about a hundred yards off the palace, and here we waited. The night dragged on. We could see the ghostly shapes of ships out beyond us, with here and there a light on them. We could hear the sounds of men's voices on ship and on shore, and on shore there were many lights.

"I am afraid they have failed," I said.

"I am afraid so," replied Duare, "but we must not leave before daylight. They might come yet."

Presently I heard shouts on shore, and very dimly I saw a boat put off. Then a torch was lighted in it, and I could see that the boat was full of warriors. The boat was not coming directly toward us, but was quartering. I could hear men shouting from the shore: "Not that way! Straight out!"

"They must have escaped," said Duare. "Those men are searching for them."

"And they're coming our way now,"

*Venus has no moon, and no stars are visible through her solid cloud blankets. Only a mysterious, eerie light relieves the gloom of the nights; so that they are not utterly black. One can see faintly for a short distance.—Ed.

I said, for the boat had changed its course, following the directions from shore.

I searched the surface of the water for some sign of Kandar and Artol, but I could not see them. The boat was coming straight for us, but not rapidly. Evidently they were moving cautiously so as not to overlook the fugitives in the darkness.

Presently I heard a low whistle—the prearranged signal. It seemed to come from off our port bow. The ship was lying with its nose toward the shore, and the boat-load of warriors was approaching from slightly to starboard.

I answered the signal and started the motor. We moved slowly in the direction from which that low whistle had come. Still I saw no sign of Kandar or Artol.

Some one in the approaching boat shouted, "There they are!" and at the same time I saw two heads break the water a few yards from us. Now I know why I had not seen them: they had been swimming beneath the surface to avoid discovery, coming up to signal and then going under again when they heard the answer. Now they were swimming strongly toward us; but the boat was approaching rapidly, twenty paddles sending it skimming across the water. It looked as though it would reach us about the same time that Kandar and Artol did.

I shouted to them: "As I pass you, grab the side of the ship and hang on! I'm going to tow you out until we're away from that boat far enough to stop and get you on board."

"Come on!" cried Kandar; "we're ready."

I opened the throttle a little and bore down on them. The Myposans were very close. They must have been surprised to see the anotar on the water, but they kept on coming. A man in the

bow raised his trident and called on us to stop.

"Take the controls, Duare," I said. She knew what to do. Duare always does. For a girl who had led the cloistered life she had in the palace of her father before I came along, she is a marvel of efficiency and initiative.

I turned and faced the boat just as the fellow in the bow cast his trident. It was a close shave for us: the weapon whizzed between Duare's head and mine. Two other warriors had risen and were poisoning their tridents; then I let them have it. The hum of my r-ray pistol sounded no warning to them, but almost simultaneously three Myposan warriors crumpled and fell—two of them over the side of the boat into the lake.

Kandar and Artol had seized the side of the ship, and Duare had given her more throttle. Two more tridents were hurled, but this time they fell short. We were pulling away rapidly, when Duare saw another boatload of warriors ahead of us. The boat had evidently been lowered from one of the ships in the roadstead.

Thinking quickly, Duare throttled down.

"Climb aboard!" she cried to the two men, and they lost no time in obeying her; then she opened the throttle wide and bore straight down on the second boat. I heard the frightened cries of its crew and saw the frantic efforts they were making to get out of our way; as Duare pulled up the anotar's nose and we rose gracefully into the air above them.

"Nice work!" I said.

"Beautiful!" said Kandar.

ARTOL was speechless for a moment. It was his first flight. This was the first plane he had ever seen.

"Why don't we fall?" he said.

Kandar was thrilled. He had heard me talk about the anotar, but I imagine that he had taken all that I said with a grain of salt. Now he could scarcely believe the testimony of his own senses.

I was planning to return Kandar and Artol to Japal, where Kandar's father, Jantor, was jong. It lies at the upper end of the Lake of Japal, about five hundred miles from Mypos; and as we didn't wish to arrive there before dawn, I determined to make a landing and ride the night out on the surface.

There was no wind, and the surface of the lake was like glass; so we made an easy landing and prepared to lie there until morning. We settled ourselves comfortably in the two cockpits, content to wait out the night.

I asked Kandar if they had much difficulty in making their escape.

"It was not easy," he said. "As you know, the outlet from the slaves' pool to the lake is too small to permit the passage of even a small man; so we had to find some way to reach one of the palace pools.

"After you killed Tyros, things were in a chaotic condition. Skabra, his wife, proclaimed herself sole ruler; but she is so generally hated that several factions sprang up, insisting that their particular candidate be made jong. There were so many of them that they have, at least temporarily, defeated their own purpose; and Skabra rules; but the discipline of the palace guards has been undermined. Naturally, they want to favor him who may be next jong; and, as they are hoping that it won't be Skabra, they are not very loyal to her. They spend most of their time holding secret meetings and scheming; so the interior palace guard is extremely lax.

"Artol and I decided to take advantage of this; and we also decided upon a bold move. We knew that the

royal pool connected with the lake; that much we were positive of; so we agreed that the royal pool was the one we would use.

"The slaves' compound is usually heavily guarded, but tonight was the exception. Only one warrior stood at the gate that leads into the palace grounds. We had no weapons, not even the wooden swords with which we are furnished when we guard the royal pool. We had nothing but our bare hands."

"And a tremendous desire to escape," added Artol.

"Yes," admitted Kandar, "that was our most powerful weapon—the will to escape. Well, we worked our way around to the guard, a great bearded fellow, who had always been extremely cruel to all of us slaves."

"That made it easier," said Artol.

"Whatever the cause, it was not difficult for Artol," said Kandar, grinning. "When we approached close to him, the guard asked what we were doing in that part of the compound, and ordered us back to our shelters; and he supplemented the order with a poke of his trident. That was what we had expected and hoped for. I seized the trident, and Artol leaped on the fellow and got him by the throat.

"You have no idea how powerful Artol is, or how quick. The guard didn't have time to cry out before his wind was shut off; and then he was down on his back with Artol on top of him, choking the life out of him; and I had the trident. I knew what to do with it, too.

"We took his sword as well as his trident; and, leaving his body where it lay, walked out into the palace grounds. This portion of them is not well lighted, and we came to the wall surrounding the royal pool without being discovered. Here was another guard. He proved a much simpler obstacle to overcome; because now we had a sword and a trident.

"Leaving his corpse resting peacefully on the ground, we entered the enclosure wherein lies the royal pool. This was well lighted, and there were several people loitering on the other side of garden. As we approached the pool, one of them came toward us. It was Plin."

"The fellow-slave who turned traitor and stole my pistol," I explained to Duare.

"Oh, by the way, how did you get it back?" asked Kandar.

"Plin threw it into the royal pool," I replied; "and when I dove in after Tyros and Duare, I found it lying at the bottom—but go on, what happened then?"

"Well," continued Kandar, "Plin screamed for the guard. We didn't wait any longer then; we both dived into the pool, hoping we could find the corridor leading to the lake and not drown before we could swim through it."

"And we barely made it," said Artol. "I think I did drown a couple of times before my head finally broke the surface. As it was I was practically unconscious, and if Kandar hadn't helped me up for a couple of minutes, I'd have been a goner."

"So that's how the search started for you so quickly," I said; "it was Plin."

Kandar nodded. "Yes," he said, "and my only regret at leaving Mypos is that I shall now not be able to kill Plin."

"I can take you back," I said.

Kandar grinned. "No thanks," he said; "I am not that mad at anybody. Then, too, having such a friend as you outweighs Plin and all my other enemies. I shall not try to thank you for what you and Duare have done for us—not in words. There are none adequate to express my gratitude."

"I am only a common warrior," said Artol, "and know but few words; but, after my jong, you have all my loyalty."

CHAPTER II

The Timals

AS dawn approached, we took off and headed up the lake toward Japal. Kandar thought that we had better set the ship down outside the city, when he and Artol could go to one of the gates and make themselves known.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that if they saw this thing flying low over the city, they might fire on it."

"With what?" I asked. "I thought you told me that you had no fire arms."

"We haven't," he replied, "but we have engines that throw rocks or lighted torches for hundreds of feet into the air. They are upon the walls of the city and the decks of the ships anchored off shore. If one hit your propeller, you would be brought down."

"We shall land outside the city," I said, and this we did.

Japal is a very much better looking city than Mypos, and larger. There is a level plain stretching inland from it, and on this plain we landed about a hundred yards from one of the city gates. We could see the consternation our appearance caused the guard at the gate. Several warriors who had been standing outside, rushed in and slammed the gates closed. Others jammed the barbican, pointing and gesticulating.

Kandar and Artol dropped to the ground and walked toward the gate. Presently we could see them talking to the men in the barbican; then they turned and started back toward us. Immediately afterward the gates

opened and several warriors rushed out; then Kandar and Artol commenced to run, the warriors pursuing them.

I realized that something was radically wrong. The crown prince of a country doesn't run away from his country's soldiers unless there is something radically wrong. I saw that the warriors were going to overtake Kandar and Artol before they could board the anotar, or at least bring them down with the spears they carried.

Of course I didn't know what the trouble was, but I saw that Kandar and Artol seemed to be in plenty. I had commenced to feel responsible for them. I think we always feel responsible for our friends. I know I do. So I decided to do something about it. My best weapon, under the circumstances, was the anotar. I gave her the gun and started toward the running men, and then I lifted her off the ground a little—just enough to clear Kandar's and Artol's heads—and dove straight for the warriors. I hadn't retracted my landing gear, and it and the pontoons simply mowed 'em down; then I rose, banked, and landed close to Kandar and Artol. They clambered into the after cockpit, and we were off.

"What happened?" I asked Kandar.

"There has been a revolution, led by a fellow named Gangor," he replied. "My father escaped. That is all I know. One of the warriors at the gate told me that much. He would have told me more if one of Gangor's officers hadn't come out and tried to arrest us."

"Wasn't it Gangor who arranged for your capture by the Myposans, Artol?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Now I owe him double vengeance. I wish that I might have gotten into the city, even though I may never avenge what he did to me."

"You may some day," said Kandar.

"No," said Artol sadly; "he has but one life, and I must avenge my jong first."

"Where to now?" I asked Kandar. "We'll take you any place you'd like to go before we set out in search of Korva."

"I can think of only one place that my father may have escaped to," said Kandar. "Far back in the mountains lives a tribe of savage aborigines called Timals. My father once befriended Yat, their chief, and they are extremely loyal to him and to all other Japalinas; though they refuse to own allegiance to any sovereign other than their own savage chieftain. I should like very much to go to the Timal country and see if my father is there."

THE flight was uneventful. We passed over some wonderful game country and several mountain ranges, until we finally came to the Timal country, a high plateau surrounded by jagged peaks—a most inaccessible country and one easily defended against invasion.

Kandar pointed out a village in a canyon which opened out onto the plateau, and I dropped down and circled above it. The people stood in the single street looking up at us. They showed neither panic nor fear. There was something peculiar in their appearance, yet they seemed to be human beings. At first I couldn't make out what it was; but as we dropped lower, I saw that they had short tails and horns. They were armed with spears and knives, and some of the males were menacing us with the former when Kandar caught sight of his father and called to him.

"My brother, Doran, is here, too," Kandar told me. "He is standing beside my father."

"Ask your father if it's safe to land," I said.

He did so and received a negative answer.

"Yat says you may come into the village, but not the strangers," Jantor shouted up to us.

"But I can't come in unless we are permitted to land the anotar," said Kandar. "Tell Yat that these people are friendly. One is Artol, a former member of your Guard; the others are Carson of Venus and his mate, Duare of Vepaja. They rescued me from Gangor. Persuade Yat to let them land."

We saw Jantor turn then and speak to a large savage, but the latter kept shaking his head; then Jantor called to us again as we circled low above the village.

"Yat says that strangers are not allowed in Timal—only I and the members of my family—and he doesn't like the looks of that ship that sails in the air. He says that it is not natural and that the people who ride in it cannot be natural—they might bring misfortune to his people. I can understand how he feels, for this is the first time that I ever saw human beings flying. Are you sure this Carson of Venus and his mate are human?"

"They are just as human as you or I," said Kandar. "Tell Yat that he really ought to let the ship land so that he can examine it. No one in Amtor ever saw such a thing before."

Well, eventually Yat gave permission for us to land; and I came down close to the village and taxied up to the end of the single street. I know that those ignorant savages must have been frightened as the anotar rolled toward them, but not one of them turned a hair or moved away a step. I stopped a few yards from Jantor and Yat, and immediately we were surrounded by

bucks with couched spears. For a moment it looked serious. The Timals are a ferocious looking people. Their faces are hideously tattooed in many colors, and their horns only add to the ferocity of their appearance.

Yat strode boldly to the side of the ship and looked up at Duare and me. Jantor and Doran accompanied him. Kandar introduced us and the old Timal chief examined us most carefully. Finally he turned to Jantor.

"He is a man, even as you," he said, indicating me. "Do you wish us to be friends with him and his woman?"

"It would please me," said Jantor; "because they are the friends of my son."

Yat looked up at me.

"Do you wish to be friends of the Timals and come among us in peace?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Then you may descend from that strange creature," he said. "You may remain here as long as you wish, the friends of Yat and his people. I have spoken, and my people have heard."

WE climbed down, glad to stretch our legs again. The Timals gathered around, but at a respectful distance, and inspected us and the ship. They had much better manners than civilized people of the great cities of Earth, who, under like circumstances, would probably have torn our ship to pieces for souvenirs and stripped our clothes from us.

"They have received you in friendship," said Jantor, "and now you will find them kind and hospitable. They are a proud people who hold their honor most sacred. As long as you merit their friendship, they will be loyal to you; should you not merit it, they will destroy you."

"We shall try to merit it," I said.

Old Yat was tremendously interested in the anotar. He walked all around it, occasionally poking it with a finger.

"It is not alive," he remarked to Jantor, "yet it flies like a bird."

"Would you like to get in it and see how I control it?" I asked.

For reply he crawled into the forward cockpit. I got in beside him and explained the controls to him. He asked several questions, and they were all intelligent questions. I could see that, despite horns and tail, Yat was a high type of reasoning human being.

"Would you like to go up in it?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Then tell your people to move away and not to come out on this level ground until I have taken off."

He did as I asked, and I came about and taxied down the valley onto the little plain. The wind was blowing right down the canyon; so my take-off was up hill, and we were going pretty fast practically up to the village before I left the ground. We skimmed over the heads of the watching Timals, and then I banked and climbed. I glanced at Yat. He showed no sign of nervousness; but just sat there as unconcerned as a frozen goldfish, looking all around at the scenery and peeking over the side of the cockpit at the panorama of landscape below.

"How do you like it?" I asked.

"Fine," he said.

"Tell me when you want to go back to your village."

"Go there," he said, and pointed.

I flew through a pass in the mountains as he had directed. Ahead and far below stretched a broad valley.

"Go there," he said, and pointed again. "Now, lower," he directed a moment later; and presently I saw a village beneath us. "Go low above that village."

I flew low above a thatched village. Women and children screamed and ran into their huts. A few warriors stood their ground and hurled spears at us. Yat leaned far over the side as I circled back at his request. This time I heard a warrior cry:

"It is Yat, the Timal!"

Yat looked as happy as a gopher with a carrot.

"Go home now," he directed. "Those were the enemies of my people," he said, after a while. "Now they will know what a great man is Yat, the Timal."

ALL the Timals of Yat's village were waiting when we returned.

"I was sure glad to see you coming back," said Kandar. "These fellows were getting nervous. Some of them thought that you had stolen Yat."

Warriors gathered around their chief.

"I have seen a new world," said Yat. "Like a bird I flew over the village of the Valley People. They saw me and knew me. Now they will know what great people the Timals are."

"You flew over the village of the Valley People!" exclaimed a warrior. "Why, that is two long marches away."

"I flew very fast," said Yat.

"I should like to fly in this bird ship," said a sub-chief, and then a dozen others voiced the same wish.

"No," said Yat; "that is for chiefs only."

He had now done something that no one else in his world had ever done. It set him apart from other men. It made him even a greater chieftain than he had been before.

We learned to like these Timals very much. They were very courteous to Duare, the women especially going out of their way to be kind to her. One would never have expected it in such primitive savages.

We rested there for a few days; and then I flew Jantor, Kandar, and Doran back to Japal to reconnoiter. As the anotar does not carry more than four comfortably, I left Duare and Artol behind. I knew that she would be safe with the Timals; and, anyway, I expected to be back before dark.

We circled low over Japal, causing quite a commotion in the streets. Jantor hoped that in some way he might get in touch with some of his friends, and learn what was going on in the city. There was always the chance of a counter-revolution that would place him back on the throne; but either his friends were all dead or imprisoned or afraid to try to communicate with him, for he never saw one whom he could trust.

As we prepared to leave and return to Timal, I circled far out over the lake, gaining considerable altitude; and from this vantage point Jantor discovered a fleet of ships far down the lake.

"If it's not asking too much," he said to me, "I'd like to fly down there and see who that is."

I headed for the fleet, and presently we were circling above it—fifty ships of war packed with fighting men. Most of them were biremes, and there were several penteconters, open galleys with decks fore and aft and propelled by fifty oars as well as sails. Some of the biremes had a hundred oars on each side and carried several hundred warriors as well. All had their sails set, and were taking advantage of a gentle breeze.

"The Myposan war fleet," said Jantor, "and it's headed for Japal."

"Gangor is going to have his hands full," remarked Kandar.

"We must warn him," said Jantor.

"But he is your enemy," expostulated Doran.

"Japal is my country," replied Jantor. "No matter who is jong there it is my duty to warn him."

ON the way back to Japal, Jantor wrote a message. We dropped down low over the palace grounds, Jantor making the sign of peace by raising his right hand. Almost immediately people commenced to come from the palace, and presently Jantor recognized Gangor and called to him.

"I have an important message for you," he said, and dropped the weighted note over the side. A warrior caught it before it reached the ground and took it to Gangor.

The fellow read it carefully and then motioned us to come lower, which I did, circling above them.

"I appreciate your warning, Jantor," said Gangor when we were within easy ear shot. "I wish you would land. We shall need your help and advice in defending the city. I promise that you will not be harmed."

I looked at Jantor; so did Kandar and Doran. We waited for his curt refusal of the invitation.

"It is my duty," he said to us. "My country is in danger."

"Don't do it," counselled Kandar. "Gangor is not to be trusted."

"He would not dare harm me after making that promise," said Jantor; "too many warriors heard him, and they are not all dishonorable men."

"All those with him are traitors like himself," said Doran.

"My duty lies there," insisted Jantor. "Will you take me down, please?"

"If you insist, I'll land you outside the city," I said; "it is your right to risk your life at the hands of a scoundrel like Gangor; but I will not risk my ship and the safety of my mate."

I circled low above them again, and Kandar exacted a new promise from

Gangor that his father would not be harmed and that he would be permitted to leave the city whenever he chose. Gangor agreed volubly—far too volubly, I thought.

"Bring that thing that you fly in right down here in the palace grounds," he said; "I'll have them cleared."

"Never mind," I said, "I shall land outside the inland gate."

"Very well," said Gangor, "and I myself will come out to meet you, Jantor, and escort you into the city."

"And don't bring too many warriors with you," I cautioned him, "and don't come within trident range of my ship. I shall take off immediately the jong has disembarked."

"Bring Kandar and Doran with you, Jantor," invited Gangor. "They will both be welcome; and I promise again that you shall all be perfectly safe the moment that you step foot within the walls of Japal."

"I shall feel better now that Doran and I are going along with you," said Kandar, as we rose and headed for the plain beyond the city.

"You are not going to accompany me," said Jantor. "You do not trust Gangor. Possibly you are right. If I die, the future of our country lies with you and Doran—the future of our dynasty. You must both live to bring men-children into the world. If all three of us placed ourselves in Gangor's power simultaneously, the temptation might prove too much for him to resist. I think that I alone shall be safe enough. Neither of you may accompany me."

"Come now, sir," exclaimed Kandar, "you must let us go with you."

"Yes," said Doran, "you must. We are your sons; what will the people of Japal think of us if we let our father go alone into the hands of his greatest enemy?"

"You shall not accompany me," said Jantor, with finality. "It is a command," and that ended the matter.

I SET the ship down three or four hundred yards from the inland gate, and presently Gangor came out of the city and approached us with a dozen warriors. They halted at plenty of distance from the ship; and Jantor, who had already dropped to the ground, advanced toward them.

"I wish we had never come here," said Kandar. "I can't help but feel that our father has made a grave mistake in trusting Gangor."

"He seems quite sure that Gangor will live up to his promise," I said. "You heard him ask me to wait and witness the battle and then come for him when it was over."

"Yes," said Doran, "but I don't share his faith. Gangor has always been notorious for his perfidy, but no one paid much attention to it because he was only captain of a merchant ship at the height of his fortunes. Who could have dreamed that he was to make himself jong of Japal!"

CHAPTER VII

Skabra Again

I COULDN'T help but have a great deal respect for Jantor. He was doing a very courageous, albeit a very temerarious, thing. I watched him as he walked toward his enemies. His step was firm, his head high. He was every inch a jong.

I had taken off immediately he left us, and was circling about rather low. Jantor had approached to within a few steps of Gangor, when the latter suddenly raised his short, heavy spear and plunged it through the jong's heart.

Kandar and Doran cried out in hor-

ror. I opened the throttle and dove straight for the wretch; and as he saw me coming, he and his warriors turned and fled for the city. Low behind them, I turned my pistol on them. Several fell, but Gangor reached the city gate in safety.

Without a word I rose and flew over the city and out across the lake. For some time neither Kandar nor Doran spoke. Their faces were drawn and tense. My heart ached for them. Finally Kandar asked me where I was going.

"I am going to tell the Myposan fleet that Japal has been warned and is ready to annihilate them."

"Why?" he asked.

"It was your father's wish to save the city. Some day you will be jong there. Do you want it conquered by the fish-men?"

"You are right," he said.

It was late in the afternoon that I dropped down low over the leading Myposan galley, the largest of the biremes. They had evidently seen us from a distance, as the deck was crowded with warriors, all staring at us.

"Be careful," cautioned Kandar. "They are preparing a rock thrower. If they hit us, we're through."

I gave the peace sign then, and called down to them that I had a message for their commander. A big fellow whom I recalled having seen in Tyros' palace answered the peace sign and motioned for me to come closer.

"Tell them to take the rock out of that catapult," I shouted.

He nodded and gave the necessary order; and after they had unloaded the thing, I dropped down quite low. The anotar is quite maneuverable and can fly at very low speeds; so I had no difficulty in carrying on at least a broken conversation with the ship.

"Who commands the fleet?" I asked.

"Skabra, the vadjong," he replied.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes; the slave who killed Tyros," he replied.

"I should like to talk with Skabra, if she is not too mad at me," I said.

THE fellow grinned. Their faces are hideous enough in repose, but when they grin, they are something to frighten grown-ups with. Their fish mouths spread across their faces, forcing their gills open. Their countless, sharp fish-like teeth are exposed behind their huge beards.

"Skabra is not angry," he said.

"Which is her ship?" I asked.

"This," he said.

"Well, tell her that Carson of Venus wishes to speak to her. Tell her I have very important news for her."

Just as I finished the sentence the old girl came on deck. God! but she's the beauty. She looks like a bloated cod fish.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "Do you want to murder me, too?"

"No," I shouted. "You were kind to my mate. I would not harm you. I have important news for you, but I can't talk this way. Get in a small boat and row off a little way. I'll come down and land on the water and talk with you."

"You must take me for a fool," she said. "I'd be at your mercy."

I had to keep circling the ship and shouting a few words at a time. It was no way in which to carry on a conversation.

"Very well," I said. "The word I have for you is very important, and I have given my word that I shall not harm you in any way. However, do as you see fit. I'll stand by a few minutes."

I COULD see them talking excitedly on the deck for a few minutes, and

then I saw a boat being lowered with Skabra in it; so I came down a short distance from the ship and waited. Presently they came alongside. The old girl greeted me pleasantly. She didn't seem to harbor any ill will because I had killed her mate, nor was I surprised at that. You see I'd not only rid her of a most obnoxious husband; but I'd put her on the throne, where she'd rule until the horrid little amphibian monstrosity that was her son grew to maturity.

"The first thing I'd like to know," she said, "is how you escaped from Mypos."

I shook my head. "I might be a prisoner there again some time; so I'll keep that secret to myself."

"Perhaps you're wise," she said; "but if you do come again, you'll be treated well, as long as I'm vadjong. Now what is the important news you have for me?"

"Japal knows that your fleet is coming, and the city is fully prepared. I advise you to turn back."

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

"For two reasons: You were kind to my mate, and the sons of Jantor are my friends. I do not wish to see Mypos and Japal at war."

She nodded.

"I understand," she said, "but nevertheless I shall keep on and attack Japal. We need more slaves. Many of our galleys are undermanned. The creatures die like flies at the oars."

We talked a little longer; and then, finding that I could not persuade her to give up her plan, I taxied away and took off. As we approached Japal, we saw that the fleet was fully manned; but remaining close to the city. Kandar wanted to wait and learn the outcome of the battle. It was now late in the afternoon; so there was little likelihood that the engagement would take place before morning, as the biremes would

move up slowly so as not to exhaust the men at the oars; they would need all their strength and energy for maneuvering during battle.

"They'll probably come up to within about a kob*," Kandar said, "and lie to until dawn; thus the slaves will be well rested."

I didn't like the idea very well, as I was anxious to return to Duare and get started on our search for Korva; but it meant so much to Kandar that I agreed to wait. He knew where there was a cove a short distance along the coast, and we flew there and anchored.

At dawn Kandar awakened me.

"The Myposan fleet is moving in," he said. "I can hear the creaking of their oars."

I LISTENED. Very faintly I could hear the complaining of the wooden oars against the wooden rowlocks. Even a greased oar is not entirely silent. We took off and headed for Japal, and almost immediately we saw the Myposan fleet coming in in three lines of fifteen or sixteen ships each. The fleet of Japal, still lay close below the city wall.

When the first line of the Myposan fleet was within a hundred yards of the enemy fleet the engagement started. A ball of fire rose from the deck of one of the Japal ships, described a graceful arc, and landed on the deck of a Myposan bireme. The burning brand had been shot from a catapult. Immediately the engagement became general. Fire balls and rocks were hurled from both sides. Many fell into the water, but many found their marks. Three ships were on fire, and I could see men hauling buckets of water from the lake to fight the flames.

Still the Myposan fleet moved in.

*A kob is two and a half of our Earthly miles.
—Ed.

"They are going to grapple and board," said Doran.

Soon I saw why the Japal fleet hugged the shore, for now the batteries on the wall of the city opened up. These were heavier than the catapults of the ships; they threw larger fire balls and heavier rocks. The penteconters had moved up now between the big ships of the Myposans. They were much faster and more maneuverable. Their principal purpose, as far as I could see, was to harass the enemy by coming alongside and hurling short spears through the ports where the rowers sat chained to their benches. Disabling enough oarsmen, and you have disabled the ship.

A rock from a shore catapult dropped directly into the center of one of the penteconters, killing two or three men instantly and crashing through the bottom of the ship, which immediately commenced to fill and sink. The survivors, leaping overboard, were speared from the deck of the Japal ship they had been attacking. I could hear the dying men screaming and cursing.

"That was a good shot," said Kandar.

By now, four of the attacking ships were burning, their crews taking to small boats, of which there were not half enough, while the slaves burned in their chains, screaming horribly.

Other Myposan ships came alongside those of Japal, and there was hand-to-hand fighting on decks slippery with blood. It was a grewsome sight, but fascinating. I dropped lower to get a better view, as the smoke from burning ships was cutting down the visibility.

I dropped too low. A rock from a catapult struck my propeller, smashing it. Now, I was, indeed, in a bad fix.

MY first thought, when I saw that my ship had been hit, was of

Duare. Here I was, over a battle between two peoples who were my enemies. What chance had I of ever returning to Timal? What was to become of Duare? I cursed myself for my crass stupidity as I glided to a landing. I just had altitude enough to permit me to land about a mile along the shore from Japal. I hoped that in the heat and excitement of battle no one on the walls of the city had seen the accident or noticed where I had gone.

I had come down close beside a forest, and I immediately got Kandar and Doran to help me push the anotar into concealment among the trees. As I looked back toward the city, I saw that smoke from burning ships hid much of it from my view; and I hoped that it had also hidden my landing from the city.

Kandar and Doran were most sympathetic. They said that the fault was all theirs. That if I had not been trying to help them, the accident would never have happened.

I told them that there was no use crying over spilled milk, and that what we had to do now was find some tools and some wood to make a new propeller. I removed what was left of the old one—one blade and the stub of the other.

As I was explaining to Kandar the tools I should need and the kind of wood, he became very much interested; and asked me many questions about the construction of a propeller, how to determine the correct pitch, and so forth. You would have thought that he was going to make one himself.

Getting the right wood was a simple matter. The same kind of trees from the wood of which I had made this propeller grew in the forest where we were, but getting tools was an entirely different matter.

"There are plenty in Japal," said Kandar. "We must find some way

to get them. Doran and I have hundreds of friends in the city, if we could only reach them."

They racked their brains for some plan, but the whole thing looked utterly hopeless. Finally Doran hit upon something which at least contained the kernel of success—but a very small kernel.

"I know a man who makes knives," he said. "I know him very well, for he has done a lot of work for me. I also know that he is honest and loyal. He lives close to the wall, not far from the inland gate. If we would reach his house, we could get knives."

"But how can we reach his house?" demanded Kandar.

"By climbing the wall," said Doran.

"At its lowest point the wall is one ted* high," Kandar said. "I can't jump that high."

"No one has to jump," explained Doran. "You stand on Carson's shoulders; I climb up and stand on yours—I am already over the wall."

"Suppose you got caught," I said. "Gangor would have you killed—no, I won't let you take that risk."

"There's practically no risk," said Doran. "We will do it after dark. Everyone will be tired after the battle; and anyway, the watch is never very good."

"How will you get back?" asked Kandar.

"My friend's house stands against the wall. The roof is only a vault below the top of the wall. I shall go down through the door in his roof, get tools, come up, and—there you are!"

"It sounds simple," said Kandar.

"I think the risk is too great," I said.

"We shall do it," said Kandar.

THAT night we approached the city after dark, Doran leading us to a

point which he was sure was just outside the knife-maker's house. It was not far from the inland gate—too close, I thought, if the sentries kept any kind of watch at all.

Everything went splendidly. Kandar climbed on to my shoulders, and Doran scrambled up on to his. There we were, just like that, when a gruff voice behind us said:

"Come down. You are prisoners. We are the guard."

I was holding onto Kandar's legs to support him, and before I could draw my pistol I was seized from behind. Kandar and Doran lost their balance and fell on top of me and half a dozen warriors. Most of us went down, but the fellow who had seized me never lost his hold.

When we had disentangled ourselves and gotten to our feet, I found that I had been disarmed. One of the warriors was displaying my pistol proudly.

"I saw him use this this morning," he said. "If I hadn't recognized him when I did and gotten it away from him he'd have killed us all."

"Be careful of it," I cautioned him; "it is apt to kill you."

"I shall be careful of it," he said, "and I shall keep it always. I shall be proud to show it to my children."

"Your children will never see it," said another. "Gangor will take it away from you."

We had been walking toward the inland gate while they were talking, and now we were admitted. Again I was a prisoner, but I thanked Heaven that Duare was not one also.

They shoved us into a room off the guardroom in the barbican, and left us there until morning. None of the warriors seemed to have recognized either Kandar or Doran, and I was hopeful that no one would.

Doran, who was quick witted, had

*A ted is 13.2 Earth feet.—Ed.

told a cock-and-bull story about our having been out hunting; and, not getting back before the gates closed, we were trying to get into the city and go to our homes.

One member of the guard asked:

"Why were you hunting when there was a battle?"

"A battle!" exclaimed Doran. "What battle? We have been gone for two days."

"The Myposans came in many ships," explained the fellow; "and there was a great battle, but we drove them off. We took many prisoners, but they got none."

"Fine," said Kandar. "I am sorry that we were not here."

About the middle of the morning an officer came and said that Gangor wanted to see the man who flew around in the air—the one who had killed so many of his warriors.

"That is I?" I said, stepping forward.

"Who are these others?"

"I don't know," I said. "They were returning from a hunting trip when I met them last night, and they asked me to help them get over the wall and into the city."

It seemed strange to me that an officer should not know either Kandar or Doran; but the former explained to me later that Gangor had evidently commissioned a lot of low born fellows, mostly sailors from ships he had sailed on; so it was not strange that they were not recognized.

"Well," said the officer, "I might as well take you all along; Gangor would probably like to see your friends, too."

The moment that we were ushered into Gangor's presence he recognized Kandar and Doran.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "the traitors. I saw you fighting against my ships yesterday."

"You saw nothing of the kind," I said.

"Shut up!" snapped Gangor. "You were all fools to try to come into Japal. Why were you coming in? A-ha! I know. You were coming to assassinate me. For that you shall die. I condemn you all to death. Take them away. Later I shall decide how they shall die."

CHAPTER IV

Into the Dungeons

WE were taken to a dungeon below the palace of the jong, into which Gangor had moved. It was a most insanitary and unpleasant place. They chained us to the wall; our jailer, who did it, being unnecessarily rough with us. He wore the keys to the dungeon and our padlocks on a chain about his neck.

He took the chain off to use the key when he fettered us; and he struck us each several times with it, just to satisfy his lust for cruelty. There could have been no other reason; as we offered no resistance, nor did we even speak to him. If I ever had murder in my heart, it was then; and for a long time I planned how I might kill him. It was then that an idea came to me.

After the fellow had left us, I noticed how dejected Doran appeared; and I told him to cheer up, that we had to die some time. I didn't feel very cheerful myself. I kept thinking of Duare. She would never know what had happened to me; but she would guess that I was dead, for she would know that only death would keep me from returning to her.

"How can I be cheerful?" said Doran, "when it was my silly plan that brought us here to die."

"It is no more your fault than ours,"

said Kandar. "We had to take a chance. It was merely a misfortune, not a fault, which caused it to fail."

"I shall never forgive myself," insisted Doran.

We remained in that dungeon for a couple of weeks. A slave brought us food once a day; we saw no one else; and then, at last, our jailer returned. He was quite alone. I backed close to the wall as he came in.

"I just came to tell you," he said, "that you are to die the first thing in the morning. Your heads are to be cut off."

"It is that homely head of yours that should be cut off," I said. "What are you, anyway, a Myposan?"

I saw Kandar and Doran looking at me in astonishment.

"Shut up!" growled the jailer, "or I'll give you another taste of the chain."

"Get out of here!" I yelled at him. "You stink. Go take a bath before you come down here again among your betters."

The fellow was so mad that he couldn't speak; but he came for me, as I knew he would—he came with his chain swinging. It was what I had planned—it was happening just as I had hoped it would; and when he came within reach of me, I seized his throat in both my hands. He tried to scream for help; but I had his wind choked off, and he couldn't. But he was beating me all the time with his chain. I pushed him over closer to Kandar.

"Grab his chain," I said, "before he beats me to death."

Kandar got hold of it and held on, while I choked the brute. I thought of the blows that he had struck us so wantonly, and I gave his neck an extra twist. I have killed many men in self-defense or in line of duty; some I have been glad to kill, but usually it has made me sad to think that I must take

a human life. Not so now, I enjoyed every second of it until his corpse hung limp in my grasp.

I SNATCHED the chain from about its neck and let it slip to the floor; then I unlocked my padlock and freed myself. Quickly I did the same for Kandar and Doran.

"At first," said Doran, "I couldn't understand why you wanted to enrage that fellow and get another beating for nothing, but the moment he stepped toward you I guessed what you had in mind. It was a very clever trick."

"Yes," I said, "but what now?"

"Maybe this is where we come in?" said Kandar. "We were both born and raised in this palace. We know more about it than the jong, our father, did."

"More than anyone in Japal," added Doran. "You know how little boys are. We explored every corner of the place."

"And you know a way out?" I asked.

"Yes," said Kandar, "but there's a hitch."

"What is it?" I asked.

"There is a secret passage leading from the palace out into the city. It ends in a building near the wall. In the cellar of that building another passage starts that leads outside the city."

"But where's the hitch?" I repeated.

"The hitch is," he said, "that the secret passage starts in the jong's own sleeping apartments, and the chances are that Gangor occupies them now."

"We'll have to wait until he is away," said Doran.

"Can we get to them without being apprehended?" I asked.

"We can try," said Kandar. "I think it can be done after dark."

"It is after dark now," I said.

"So we start," said Doran.

"And may our luck hold," added Kandar.

Kandar led the way along a dark cor-

ridor and up a flight of stairs at the top of which he cautiously opened a door and looked into the room beyond.

"All right," he whispered, "come on."

He led us into the palace kitchen, and through that and several pantries into a huge state diningroom. The jongs of Japal lived well. We followed Kandar to the end of the room farthest from the main entrance, and here he showed us a little door hidden behind hangings.

"Where the jong used to escape when he became bored," he explained.

Beyond the door was a narrow corridor.

"Go quietly," cautioned Kandar. "This corridor leads to the jong's sleeping apartments. We'll have a look in them and see if Gangor is there."

We crept along noiselessly through the dark little corridor until Kandar halted at a door. We pressed close behind him as he opened it a crack. The room beyond was in darkness.

"Gangor is probably drinking with some of his cronies," whispered Kandar, "and hasn't retired yet. We are in luck. Come on, follow me; but still go quietly."

We crept across that dark room, Doran touching Kandar to keep in contact and follow him, and I touching Doran. It seemed a perfectly enormous room to me, and traversing it that way in total darkness, I somehow lost my balance just enough to cause me to throw one foot out to regain my equilibrium. Well, I threw it in the wrong place at the wrong time. It hit a table or something and knocked it over. The thing fell with a crash that would have awakened the dead; and instantly there was a cry, and a light went on.

There was Gangor right in front of us sitting up on his sleeping couch, screaming for the guard. On a table at the side of the couch lay my pistol. Gangor had taken it away from the warrior

of the guard all right. It would have been better for him had he not.

As I leaped forward and snatched it from the table, a dozen warriors burst into the apartment.

"This way!" Kandar shouted to me, and the three of us backed away toward the secret entrance to the corridor leading from the palace. At least I thought that that was where he was leading us, but he wasn't. As he told me later, he had not wished to reveal the secret to Gangor and his warriors.

I menaced the advancing guardsmen with my pistol.

"Stand back!" I ordered. "Don't come closer, or I'll kill you!"

"Kill them! screamed Gangor. "Kill them all!"

A WARRIOR rushed me. I pressed the trigger—but nothing happened. For the first time since I had had it, my r-ray pistol failed me—failed me when it was a question of life or death and even more; a question as to whether I was ever to return to Duare again.

But, unarmed as I was, there were other weapons at hand. Maybe they had not been designed as instruments of death, but they were to serve their purpose. I seized a bench and hurled it into the face of the advancing warrior. He went down; and immediately Kandar and Doran grasped the possibilities of the furnishings of the apartment, and seized upon the nearest things at hand.

Behind them a cluster of spears had been arranged upon the wall as a decoration. I saw them and dragged them down. Now we were armed! But the odds were against us—twelve against three; or rather eleven now, for the man I had hit with the bench lay where he had fallen, and Gangor only sat on his couch screaming for more guardsmen. I saw Kandar working his way to-

ward him; and so Doran and I moved with him, keeping our backs against the wall.

Fencing with spears is quite an interesting experience; while thus engaged, one does not doze, I can assure you. It happened that the spear which had fallen to me was light and rather long, a fact which gave me an advantage that I was not long in realizing and seizing upon. I found that while I could not parry well with one hand, I could jab quite effectively; so, picking up a light table to use as a shield, I succeeded so well that I jabbed an antagonist in the heart after parrying his thrust with my table.

Doran and Kandar had each killed a man, and now the remainder of them seemed less keen to push the assault. Kandar had worked around until he was close beside Gangor's couch; and as he jerked his spear from the heart of a dead guardsman, he wheeled and drove it through Gangor's body.

Gangor did not die immediately. He lay sprawled across his couch vomiting blood; and between paroxysms, screaming in agony. Jantor, jong of Japal, had been avenged.

Now more warriors were pushing into the chamber; and it looked pretty bad for us three, when there burst upon our ears the sound of gongs and trumpets. As if by magic, the fighting stopped, as we all listened.

BENEATH the sound of the gongs and trumpets, we could hear men shouting.

"It is the call to arms!" cried a warrior. "The city has been attacked."

"The Myposans have returned," said another. "Who will lead us? We have no jong."

"You have a jong," I cried. "Follow Kandar! He is your jong."

They hesitated for a moment; then

a warrior said:

"Kandar is jong. I will follow him. Who will come with me?"

Kandar, taking advantage of their indecision, started for the door; and Doran and I followed him.

"Come!" commanded Kandar. "To the streets. To the defense of Japal!" Like sheep they followed him.

When we arrived in the palace grounds and the warriors there saw Kandar and Doran leading some of their fellows, they cheered; then Kandar took command, leading a strong party out into the city streets where fighting was in progress.

It was then that I saw that it was not Myposans who had attacked Japal, but strange, repulsive looking warriors of a sickly greenish hue and entirely hairless—no hair on their heads, no whiskers, no eyebrows, no eyelashes—and right on the tops of their heads was a little knob of flesh. They fought with swords and long-handled hooks, holding the latter in their left hands. With these hooks they would catch an antagonist and draw him close; then cut or thrust at him with the sword. Oftentimes, the hook was enough if the point caught at the base of the brain. They were nasty weapons.

If my pistol had been serviceable they wouldn't have worried me much, but with only a spear I felt very much at a disadvantage. I had had no time to examine the pistol since I had recovered it, but now I stopped before getting into the thick of the fight and went over it carefully. Evidently some one had been tampering with it, probably in an effort to discover how it worked; and I was much relieved to see that they had merely changed an adjustment.

In a few seconds I had remedied the trouble; and when I looked up I saw that I was just in time, or almost just

in time. I wasn't quite sure which, for a big green devil was reaching for me with his hook.

I was in a most disadvantageous position, as I had rested my spear in the hollow of my left elbow with the butt on the ground while I worked on my pistol; and the hook had already passed over my shoulder to take me in the back of the neck. It was just the matter of a split second before I should be gaffed.

I did what was probably the best thing, but I did it quite mechanically—there was no time for conscious reasoning. I sprang toward my antagonist. Had I sprung away, the hook would have impaled me; but by springing toward him I confused him. At the same time I struck his sword aside with my left arm and sent a stream of r-rays through his heart. It was a close call.

Kandar and Doran were in the thick of the fight a little ahead of me. Kandar was closer, and he was hotly engaged with one of the invaders. He, too, had nothing but a spear; and I hurried to his aid. He had so far successfully knocked the gaff to one side every time his antagonist reached for him with it; and then he would have to parry a sword thrust; so he never got a chance to bring his spear into play as an offensive weapon. He was always on the defensive, and no duel or war was ever won that way.

I reached him just as a second enemy attacked him. The r-rays hissed from the muzzle of my gun, and both Kandar's antagonists went down; then I started right through the ranks of the enemy, spraying r-rays to the right and left and ahead, cutting a path wide enough to drive a combine through. I was having a glorious time. I felt as though I were winning a war all by myself.

SUDDENLY I realized that the invaders were fleeing before me and on both sides. I looked back. I could see nothing but these hideous warriors. They had closed in behind me, and I was being carried along with them. Presently I was tripped; and as I fell, I was seized on either side, my pistol was snatched from my hand, and I was hustled along with the defeated army.

Down the main street of Japal they dragged me and out through the inland gate, nor did their retreat end there; for Japal's fighting men followed them far out onto the plain, constantly harassing their rear. It was almost dark when they abandoned the pursuit and turned back toward the city. It was then that I became convinced that Kandar did not know I had been made prisoner. Had he, I am sure that he would never have given up the pursuit until I had been rescued.

A warrior on each side had been dragging me along up to this time; but now that the pursuit had ceased a halt was called; and while the creatures rested, a rope was tied about my neck; and when the march was resumed, I was led along like a cow to the slaughter.

I saw my pistol tucked into the loin-cloth of a warrior; and I kept my eyes on the fellow, hoping that I might find an opportunity to retrieve it. I knew that only as a forlorn hope could I use it if I had it; for my captors were so numerous that, though I might have killed many of them, I knew that eventually they would have overwhelmed me.

I was terribly depressed. Ill fortune seemed to dog my footsteps. Right on the threshold of freedom that would have permitted me to rejoin Duare immediately, my rash impetuosity had plunged me into a predicament which



Bound with ropes, I was led
through the strange forest of
growing Brokol babies

was probably as fraught with danger as any I had ever encountered. Why should I have tried to fight a battle practically singlehanded? I don't know. Probably I am overconfident in my own prowess, but I have reason to be. I have come through some mighty trying experiences and escaped hundreds of dangers.

Where were these strange, silent creatures taking me? What fate lay in store for me? I had not heard them speak a word since I had seen them. I wondered if they were alalus, lacking vocal organs.

One of them approached me as we resumed the march. He wore three gold armlets, and the haft of his gaff was circled by three golden rings.

"What is your name?" he demanded in the universal language of Amtor.

So they were not alalus.

"Carson of Venus," I replied.

"From what country come you?"

"The United States of America."

"I never heard of it," he said. "How far is it from Brokol?"

"I never heard of Brokol," I replied. "Where is that?"

He looked disgusted.

"Every one has heard of Brokol," he said. "It is the greatest empire in Amtor. It lies forty kob from here on the other side of those mountains." That would be a hundred miles. I not only had to get myself captured, but now I had to walk a hundred miles!

"Then my country is ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol," I said, doing some lightning mental calculating.

"There is nothing that far away from anything," he said, petulantly. "You are lying to me, and that will make it worse for you."

"I am not lying," I said. "That is the nearest my country ever gets to Brokol; sometimes it is farther away

than that."

"You are the greatest liar I have ever heard of," he said. "How many people live in your country?"

"If I tell you, you won't believe me."

"Tell me anyway. It is probably a little country. Do you know how many people live in Brokol?"

"I'm afraid I could never guess."

"You are very right that you could never guess—there are fifty thousand people living in Brokol!" I guess he expected me to faint.

"Indeed?" I said.

"Yes, fifty thousand; and I am not lying to you. Now how many live in your little country? Tell me the truth."

"Somewhere around a hundred and thirty-four million."

"I told you to tell me the truth. There are not that many people in all Amtor."

"My country is not on Amtor."

I THOUGHT he was going to explode, he became so angry.

"Are you trying to make a fool of me?" he demanded, turning a dark green.

"Not at all," I assured him. "There is no reason why I should lie to you. My country is in another world. If Amtor were not surrounded by clouds, you could see it at night shining like a tiny ball of fire."

"I said you were the greatest liar I had ever heard of," he said. "I now say that you are the greatest liar any one ever heard of; you are the greatest liar in the world."

I do not like to be called a liar, but what was I to do about it? Anyway, there was something of awe and respect in the way he said it that made it sound more like a compliment than an insult.

"I don't see why you should doubt me," I said. "The chances are that you

have never heard of Vepaja, or Hava-too, or Korva, yet they are countries which really exist."

"Where are they?" he demanded.

"Right on Amtor," I said.

"If you can lead us to countries we have never heard of, you will probably not be sacrificed to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja; but you had better not lie to her or to Duma."

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja, literally translated into English, means most high more than women. None of the various peoples of Amtor with whom I had come in contact had any religion, but this name and his mention of sacrifice in connection with it suggested that she might be a goddess.

"Is Loto-El-Ho-Ganja your vad-jong?" I asked. Vadjong means queen.

"No," he said, "she is not a woman; she is more than a woman. She was not born of woman, nor did she ever hang from any plant."

"Does she look like a woman?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "but her beauty is so transcended that mortal women appear as beasts by comparison."

"And Duma?" I asked. "Who is Duma?"

"Our jong—the richest and most powerful jong in Amtor. You will probably see him when we reach Brokol, and maybe Loto-El-Ho-Ganja, too. I think they will wish to see such a great liar, one whose hair and eyes, even, are lies."

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded.

"I mean that there can be no such thing as a man with yellow hair and gray eyes; therefore they must be a lie."

"Your powers of reasoning are amazing," I said.

He nodded in agreement, and said,

"I have talked enough," and walked away.

If these Brokols have anything to recommend them, it is their lack of garrulity. They talk when they have something to say; otherwise they remain silent, in which they differ greatly from most of my own species. I am always amazed, if not always amused, by the burst of feminine gabble which follows the lowering of a theater curtain for an intermission. There can't be that much important conversation in a lifetime.

CHAPTER V

The Most Beautiful Woman

I MUST say that after my conversation with this chap, whose name I later learned was Ka-at (kā-ăt), I was really curious to reach Brokol and see a woman so beautiful that she made other women appear as beasts. If it hadn't been for my concern over Duare, I'd have looked forward to it as another rare adventure. One must die eventually, even though he has been inoculated with the longevity serum as have I; so if he has no one dependent upon him, he might as well crowd all of adventure and experience into his life that he can, even though he at times risk that life.

During the long marches to Brokol no one spoke to me again. They communicated with me and among themselves largely by signs. I sometimes wondered that their vocal cords did not atrophy. I had much time to think; and of course most of my thoughts revolved about Duare, but I also thought of the strange suggestions Ka-at had placed in my mind. I wondered what he meant when he said that Loto-El-Ho-Ganja had never hung from any plant. Why should anyone wish to

hang from a plant? I am quite sure that the horse thieves they used to lynch in the days of our old West would not have chosen to hang from a tree or from anything else.

The Brokol carried nothing but their spears, swords, and a little bag of food; for we lived off the country as we went; so they covered quite a little ground every day. During the morning of the fifth day we climbed through a mountain pass, and from the summit I saw a city lying on a well watered tableland below.

The party halted at the summit; and, looking down upon the city, bowed three times from the waist. We were standing pretty close together, and the opportunity I had been awaiting came because of that. I was behind and touching the warrior who carried my pistol. As he bowed, I brushed against him; and when he straightened up, he did not have my pistol—it was hidden in my loin cloth.

I didn't know when the opportunity to use it might come. I knew that I couldn't shoot my way out of a city full of enemies, but as a last resort I could sell my life dearly. Anyway, I was glad to have my weapon back again; somehow it gives me a feeling of security and superiority that I don't have without it; and that is strange; because before I came to Venus I never carried a weapon of any description.

The bowing at the summit of the pass, I learned later, was something of a religious ritual, Brokol being considered by them a holy city. In it was located the principal temple of Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. Here came the people of the lesser villages to worship and make offerings.

We continued the march immediately, and were soon at one of the gates of Brokol. I shall not bore you with the details of our entry into the city, but

I may say that it was not a triumphal entry for Ka-at. He had been defeated, and he brought back no spoils and only a single prisoner. Ka-at was a vookokor,* or commander of a thousand men.

The three gold armlets that he wore and the three golden rings which encircled the haft of his gaff were the insignia of his office.

I WAS taken to an open square or plaza in a poor part of the city and locked in a cage. There were a number of these cages, but only one other had an occupant. He was a human being like myself, and his cage was next to mine. We were not exactly on exhibit; but the plaza was not enclosed, and many Brokols came and gaped at us. Some of them poked us with sticks, and others threw stones at us. For the most part, however, they just looked and commented—a word or a short phrase. They were not given to loquacity.

One looked at me and said to his companion,

"What is it?"

The other just shook his head.

"Yellow hair," said the first.

"Gray eyes," said the second.

They were running on terribly, for Brokols.

"You talk too much," the man in the next cage yelled at them.

One of them threw a rock at him, and then they both walked away.

"They hate to have anyone say they talk too much," confided my neighbor.

I nodded. I was suddenly sick at heart, as though I felt a premonition of tragedy. Somehow I connected it with Duare, and I didn't feel much like

* Vookokor means, literally, a thousand daggers; and is a military title corresponding with our colonel.—Ed.

talking.

The fellow in the next cage shook his head sadly.

"You don't look like a Brokol," he said, "but you talk like one. It is too bad. When I saw you coming I thought that I was going to have some one to talk with. I have been afraid that I was going to forget how to talk."

"I am sorry," I said. "I shall be glad to talk with you."

He brightened up.

"My name is Jonda," he said.

"Mine is Carson."

"I am from Tonglap. Where are you from?"

"From Korva," I said. There was no use going through the futile explanation of where the United States of America was. No one on Venus could have understood it.

"I never heard of Korva," he said. "Tonglap is far away in that direction." He pointed toward the north. "I am a vookor* in the army of Tonglap."

The days dragged heavily, and I became much depressed. Here I was in a cage in a strange land, a prisoner of queer, half human creatures; my ship lay disabled at Japal; and Duare was far away in Timal. How long, I wondered, would those savage people remain friendly to her. I began to lose hope, for it seemed impossible that she and I ever would be reunited, that we should ever reach Korva.

Jonda had told me that at any moment one of us might be chosen as a human sacrifice to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja.

"From remarks I have overheard," he said, "I think she either drinks the blood of the victim or bathes in it."

"I understand that she is very beautiful," I said. "Have you ever seen her?"

"No, and I don't want to. I understand that it isn't good for one's health to have Loto-El-Ho-Ganja take an interest in one. Let us hope that she never hears of us."

After a couple of weeks Jonda and I were taken from our cages and put to work cleaning up an oval field which had tiers of benches built around it. The benches were raised, the lower tier being some ten feet above the ground; so that the whole thing resembled a Spanish bull ring more than it did anything else. There were two main gates and a number of small doors in the wooden paling surrounding it.

I remarked to Jonda that it seemed strange to me that we didn't see more slaves in the city. As far as I knew, there were only the two of us.

"I've never seen any others," he replied. "Duma, the jong, sent out that expedition under Ka-at to gather slaves; but he didn't do very well. He may have had his head lopped off for it by this time."

"Shut up!" snapped one of the warriors that were guarding us. "You talk too much. Work, don't talk."

While we were working, half a dozen warriors entered the arena and approached our guard.

"The jong has sent for these two," said their leader.

One of our guard nodded, and asked, "And us?"

The leader of the warriors just nodded. No words wasted there.

THEY conducted us to the palace grounds and through what appeared to be a well kept orchard of small fruit trees. I could see what appeared to be some kind of fruit hanging from the branches, but only one or two to a tree. There were many guards about.

When we had come closer to the or-

*Vookor really means one dagger, but is the title of an officer who commands one hundred men, a captain. Tonglap means big land.—Ed.

chard, I was amazed to see that what I had thought was fruit were diminutive Brokols dangling in the air by stems attached to the tops of their heads. This suddenly explained many things, among them the knob on the tops of the heads of all the Brokols I had seen and Ka-at's statement that Loto-El-Ho-Ganja had never hung from a plant.

The little Brokols were perfectly formed. Most of them hung quietly, swaying in the breeze, with their eyes shut; but a few were very active, wiggling their arms and legs and making complaining sounds. It all reminded me of the first stirrings of a new born babe, yet there was something almost obscene about it. They were of all sizes, from those but an inch long to some that were fully fifteen inches in length.

Jonda pointed to one of these, and remarked,

"Pretty nearly ripe and about to fall off."

"Shut up!" snapped one of our guard. That was practically the extent of the conversations we ever had with our captors.

We were taken into the presence of the jong, where we were told to bow four times. It is remarkable that from the depth of the African forest to the Court of Versailles, on Earth or Venus, there is a similarity in the trappings and the ritual surrounding kings.

The throne room of Duma was as elaborate as the culture and means of the Brokols could make it. There were battle scenes painted on the walls, there were dyed fabrics hanging at the windows and doorways, swords and spears and the heads of animals adorned the walls.

Duma sat upon a carved bench on a dais strewn with furs. He was a large man, as hairless and hideous as his subjects; and he was loaded with bracelets,

armlets, and anklets of gold. A Brokol woman, the first I had seen, sat on a lower bench beside him. She, too, was weighted down with golden ornaments. She was Duma, the vadjong. This I learned later, as also that the jongs of Brokol were always named Duma; and the vadjongs, Duma.

"Which is the slave from Japal?" asked Duma, and then, "I see, it must be the one with yellow hair and gray eyes. Ka-at did not lie. Did you tell Ka-at that you came from a country ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol, fellow?"

"Yes," I said.

"And did you tell him that there were a hundred and thirty-four million people in your country?"

"Correct."

"Ka-at did not lie," he repeated.

"Nor did I," I said.

"Shut up!" said Duma; "you talk too much. Could you lead an expedition to that country for the purpose of obtaining loot and slaves?"

"Of course not," I replied; "we could never reach it. Even I may never return to it."

"You are, even as Ka-at said, the greatest liar in the world," said Duma; then he turned his eyes upon Jonda. "And you," he said; "where are you from?"

"From Tonglap."

"How many people are there?"

"I never counted them," replied Jonda, "but I may say that there are fully ten times as many as there are in Brokol."

"Another liar," said Duma. "Brokol is the largest country in the world. Can you lead my warriors to Tonglap, so that they may take prisoners and loot?"

"I can, but I won't," said Jonda. "I am no traitor."

"Shut up!" said Duma. "You talk

too much." He spoke to an officer. "Take this one who is from Tonglap and put him back in his cage. Loto-El-Ho-Ganja wished to see the other one. She has never seen a man with yellow hair and gray eyes. She did not believe Ka-at any more than I did. She said, also, that she would be amused to hear the greatest liar in Amtor."

THEY led Jonda away, and then several men with plumes fastened to their heads surrounded me. They carried golden gaffs and very heavy short-swords with ornate hilts. Their leader looked at Duma, who nodded; and I was led from the throne room.

"When you enter the presence of Loto-El-Ho-Ganja, bow seven times," the leader instructed me, "and do not speak unless you are spoken to; then only answer questions. Ask none and make no gratuitous observations of your own."

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja has a throne room of her own in a temple that stands not far from the palace. As we approached it, I saw hundreds of people bringing offerings. Of course I could not see everything that they brought; but there were foods and ornaments and textiles. It evidently paid well to head the church of Brokol, as it does to head most churches and cults. Even in our own Christian countries it has not always proved unprofitable to emulate the simple ways of Christ and spread his humble teachings.

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja sat on a gorgeous golden throne that made Duma's bench look like a milkmaid's stool. She was surrounded by a number of men garbed like those who escorted me. They were her priests.

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja was not a bad looking girl. She was no Brokol, but a human being like me. She had brunette hair and eyes and a cream colored skin

with just a tinge of olive, through which glowed a faint pink upon her cheeks. I'd say that if she were not beautiful, she was definitely arresting and interesting; and she looked alert and intelligent.

After I had bowed seven times she sat looking at me in silence for a long time.

"What is your name?" she asked after a while. She had a lovely contralto voice. Listening to it, I could not imagine her drinking human blood or taking a bath in it.

"I am Carson kum Amtor, Tanjong kum Korva," I replied; which, in English, would be Carson of Venus, Prince of Korva.

"And where is Korva?"

"It is a country far to the south."

"How far?"

"I do not know exactly—several thousand kobs, however."

"Did you not tell Ka-at that your country lay ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol?" she demanded. "Were you lying then or now?"

"I was not lying at all. The world from which I originally came is not Korva, and that other world is ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol."

"By what name is it known?" she asked.

"The United States of America."

She wrinkled her brows in thought at that; and a strange, puzzled expression came into her eyes. She seemed to be straining to bring some forgotten memory from the deepest recesses of her mind, but presently she shook her head wearily.

"The United States of America," she repeated. "Would you tell me something about your country? I cannot see what you could expect to gain by lying to me."

"I shall be glad to tell you anything you wish to know," I replied, "and I can assure you that I shall not lie to you."

She arose from her throne and stepped down from the dais.

"Come with me," she said, and then she turned to one of her priests. "I would examine this man alone. You may all leave."

"But, Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," objected the man, "it would be dangerous to leave you alone with this man. He is an enemy."

She drew herself up to her full height.

"I am Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," she said. "I know all things. I have looked into this man's eyes; I have looked into his soul, and I know that he will not attempt to harm me."

The fellow still hesitated.

"Such a thing has never been done," he said.

"You heard my command, Ro-ton," she said sharply. "Do you, my high priest, dare question my authority?"

HE moved away at that, and the others followed him. Loto-El-Ho-Ganja led me across the room toward a small door. The throne room of this goddess, if that was what she was, was even more elaborate than that of Duma, the jong; but its wall decorations were gruesome—rows of human skulls with crossed bones beneath them; doubtless the skulls and bones of human sacrifices.

The small room to which she led me was furnished with a desk, several benches, and a couch. The benches and the couch were covered with furs and cushions. Loto-El-Ho-Ganja seated herself on a bench behind the desk. "Sit down," she said, and I seated myself on a bench opposite her.

She asked me about the same questions that Duma had, and I gave her

the same answers that I had given him; then she asked me to explain how there could be another world so far from Venus, and I gave her a very sketchy explanation of the solar system.

"Sun, planets, moons," she said musingly, "moons and stars."

I had not mentioned stars. I wondered how she could have known the word.

"Before they brought me before you," I said, "I was told to speak only when I was spoken to, and to ask you no questions."

"You would like to ask me some questions?"

"Yes."

"You may," she said. "Ro-ton and the lesser priests would be shocked," she added, with a shrug and a smile.

"How did you know about stars?" I asked.

She looked surprised.

"Stars! What do I know about stars? I am Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. That answers your question. I know many things. Sometimes I do not know how I know them. I do not know how I knew about stars. In the back of my mind are a million memories, but most of them are only vague and fragmentary. I try very hard to piece them together or to build them into recognizable wholes," she sighed, "but I never can."

"Of course you are not a Brokol," I said. "Tell me how you came to be here, a living goddess among alien people."

"I do not know," she said. "That is one of the things I can never recall. Once I found myself sitting on the temple throne. I did not even know the language of these people. They had to teach me it. While I was learning it, I learned that I was a goddess; and that I came from the fires that surround

Amtor. My full title is Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj," (literally Most High More Than Woman Of The Fire; or, for short, Fire Goddess), "but that is too long and is only used on state occasions and in rituals. Ro-ton and a few of the others I permit to call me just Loto in private." She pronounced it lō'tō, and as it means Most High, it was still something of a title.

"You," she added graciously, "may call me Loto while we are alone."

I felt that I was getting on pretty well, to be permitted to call a goddess by her first name. I hoped that she was going to like me so well that she wouldn't care to drink my blood, or even bathe in it.

"I shall call you Carson," she said. "Like so many other things that I cannot understand, I seemed to be drawn to you from the moment I first saw you by some mysterious bonds of propinquity. I think it was when you said 'United States of America.' That name seemed to strike a responsive chord within me. Why, I do not know. United States of America!" She whispered the words softly and slowly, almost caressingly; and there was that strange far-away look in her eyes.

CHAPTER VI

The Mystery of Loto

LOTO and I were getting on famously when there came a scratching at the door.

"Enter!" said The Fire Goddess.

The door was opened, and Ro-ton stood scowling on the threshold.

"I thought I told you we were to be left alone," said the goddess with some asperity.

"I come from Duma," said Ro-ton. "He wishes to offer a sacrifice to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," and he looked straight

at me with a very nasty expression on his green face.

"If he insists, I shall accept his sacrifice," said Loto; "but I shall reserve the right to select the victim," and she looked so meaningly at Ro-ton that he turned a dark green, which faded almost immediately to a sickly greenish white. "It will probably be one of those who disobey me."

Ro-ton faded from the scene, closing the door after him; while Loto tapped her sandalled toe upon the floor.

"He aggravates me so," she said. "Whenever I demonstrate any liking for a person, he runs immediately to Duma and gets him to select that person as an offering. One of these days I am going to lose patience and select Ro-ton myself. That would be a great honor for Ro-ton, but I don't think he'd enjoy it."

"Is it true," I asked, "that you drink the blood of the sacrificial offerings?"

Her eyes flashed angrily.

"You are presumptuous!" she exclaimed. "You have taken advantage of my kindness to you to ask me to divulge one of the most sacred secrets of the temple."

I stood up.

"I am sorry," I said. "Now I suppose I must go."

"Sit down!" she snapped. "I am the one to decide when you are to go. Have you no manners?"

"I have never before had the honor of being entertained by a goddess," I said; "so I do not know just how to act."

"You are not being entertained by a goddess," she said. "You are entertaining one. Goddesses do not entertain any one, especially slaves."

"I hope that I *am* entertaining you, Most High," I said.

"You are. Now tell me more about the United States of America. Has it

many cities?"

"Thousands."

"Any as large as Brokol?"

"Most of them are larger. One has nearly seven million people."

"What is that city called?" she asked.

"New York."

"New York," she repeated. "New York. It seems just as though I had heard that name before."

Again we were interrupted by scratching on the door. It was a priest to announce that Duma, the jong, was coming to the temple to pay his respects to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. Loto flushed angrily, but she said:

"We will receive him. Summon the priests to the holy chamber." When the priest was gone, she turned again to me. "I cannot leave you here alone," she said; "so you will have to come with me."

WE went out into the throne room.

It was what she called the holy chamber. Loto told me to stand over at one side; then she took her place on the throne. Priests were arriving. Ro-ton came. They made a barbarous spectacle in that skull decorated room, with their green skins and their plumes of office.

Soon I heard the sound of drums, first at a distance; then drawing nearer; and presently Duma entered, preceded by drummers and followed by fully a hundred officers. They stopped before the dais and bowed seven times; then Duma mounted the dais and sat on a low bench next to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. Everyone else in the room remained standing. You could have heard a pin drop, it was so quiet.

They went through a sort of stupid ritual for a while, Duma standing up every few seconds and bowing seven times. When that was over they com-

menced their conversation. I could hear every word.

"Ro-ton tells me that you have refused my sacrifice," said Duma. "That is something that has never before happened."

"I did not refuse it," replied Loto. "I simply said that I would select the victim."

"That is the same as refusing it," said Duma. "I wish to select my own offering."

"You may," said Loto, "but I have the right to refuse any offering that is not acceptable. You seem to forget that I am Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj."

"And you seem to forget that I am the jong of Brokol," snapped Duma.

"To a goddess, a jong is only another mortal," said Loto, icily. "Now, if you have no further matters to discuss, I permit you to withdraw."

I could see that Duma was furious. He turned dark green, and he fairly glared at Loto.

"A jong has warriors," he said, angrily. "He can enforce his wishes."

"You threaten me?" demanded Loto.

"I demand that I be permitted to select my own offering." Duma was fairly shouting now.

"I told you that you might name your selection," said Loto.

"Very well," said Duma. "It is the slave, Carson, with whom you have been closeted alone for hours, defying the traditions of the temple."

"I decline your offering," said Loto.

Duma leaped to his feet.

"Take that slave back to his cage," he shouted. "I'll attend to this woman later. Now I declare that she is no goddess, but that I, Duma, am a god. Let those who accept me as their god bow seven times."

That was the last I heard, as several warriors had seized me and hustled me out of the holy chamber.

They took me back to my cage and locked me in. Jonda was still in the adjoining cage; and when I told him what had happened, he said that I didn't have long to live now.

"That's what comes of getting mixed up with goddesses and jongs," he added.

"They were going to kill me anyway," I reminded him. "At least this way nobody's going to drink my blood."

"Maybe Duma will," he suggested. "You say he's god now. If that is so, he can select you for his first sacrifice."

"I wonder if the people will stand for his ousting Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," I said.

"If a jong has plenty of warriors, his people will stand for anything," said Jonda.

"Loto-El-Ho-Ganja seemed all-powerful to me," I said. "The high priest and the jong did her homage and stepped around for her until Duma lost his temper."

"Look!" exclaimed Jonda, pointing. "Who is that they're bringing? I've never seen a human woman here before."

I looked and was shocked.

"It is Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," I said.

"So Duma is a god now!" said Jonda.

Two warriors were escorting Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. They were not rough with her. Perhaps they felt that she might be a goddess regardless of what Duma had proclaimed, and one doesn't willingly offend a goddess.

They were coming toward our cages; and presently they stopped in front of mine, unlocked the door, and pushed Loto in with me.

I HAVE had many strange experiences in my adventurous life, but being locked up in a cage over night with a goddess was a new one. Loto

appeared dazed. I imagine the shock of her fall from Olympus was terrific.

"What happened?" I asked.

"This is the end," she said. "Thank God, this is the end. I feel it."

She spoke in Amtorian, all but one word: God. That she spoke in English! There is no word for God in Amtorian. Most High More than Woman of the Fire is the nearest approach to the name of a diety that I have ever heard here. Where did she learn that one English word? I asked her; but she only looked more dazed than ever, and said that she did not know.

"Why is it the end, Loto?" I asked.

"He has condemned me to death," she said, and then she laughed. "I, who cannot die, and condemned to death. But he has condemned you, too—you and this other prisoner—and you *can* die. I wish that I might save you."

"You tried to, Loto," I reminded her. "Why did you do that? It has cost you your life."

"I liked you," she said. "I was drawn to you by some power I do not understand."

We three, Loto, Jonda, and I, condemned to death, talked together long into the night. They told me strange, almost unbelievable things about these green Brokol people. They told me that their blood was not red; but white, like the sap of some plants, and that they ate no meat, though they drank the blood of warm blooded animals.

I asked about the tiny Brokols I had seen hanging from trees, and they told me that the Brokol females laid small, nut-like eggs which were planted in the ground. These grew into trees; and in a matter of years, bore the fruit I had seen hanging. When the little Brokols were ripe, they dropped from the trees wild, untamed creatures that had to be captured and disciplined.

Each family usually had its own orchard of Brokol trees, the one I had seen, belonging to the royal family. Guypals, the great birds with which I had become familiar at Mypos, accounted for many little ripening Brokols, which accounted for the armed warriors guarding the royal orchard. Here was a race of people who not only had family trees, but family orchards.

When a woman planted an egg, she stuck a little marker in the ground beside it to identify it, just as our home gardeners place markers every spring in their gardens so that they will know which are beets and which tomatoes when they come up.

Because of guypals and insect pests the infant mortality of the Brokols is appallingly high, not one in a thousand reaching maturity. However, as the Brokols are polygamous and both the ground and the females extremely fertile, there is little danger that race suicide will exterminate them. I might mention that no dogs are allowed in the orchards.

DURING a lapse in the conversation, Loto suddenly exclaimed,

"I did not drink human blood. While I was Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj, I could not tell you; but now that I have been deposed I am free to speak."

"Somehow, I could not believe that you did," I told her, "but I am glad to hear it from your own lips."

"No," she said, "it was Ro-ton, Duma, and a few of the more favored priests who got the blood to drink. It was only their craving for blood which ever induced them to sacrifice a human slave, as these were considered very valuable as workers. Most of the offerings were Brokols who had incurred the displeasure of Duma or Ro-ton, but they did not drink the blood of these. I did not even kill the victim; Ro-ton

did that. I merely presided and repeated a chant; but the priests let the people think that I drank the blood, in order to impress them. It seems that the common people must be afraid of their goddess in order to be held under control."

"You and Carson speak of strange creatures of which I have never heard," said Jonda, the godless one.

"Let us talk of something else then," said Loto.

"I should like to hear more about the United States of America, of New York—New York—New York—" She whispered the name slowly, drawing it out; and her eyes were dreamy and introspective. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Betty! Betty! Betty! I'm getting it!" She was terribly excited. "Call—call—Betty call. I almost have it! Oh, God, I almost have it! Brooklyn! Now I have it! Brooklyn!" Then she swooned.

I tried to revive her, but she didn't respond; so I had to let her lie there. I knew that she would regain consciousness eventually.

What she had said mystified me. What could she know about Brooklyn? I had mentioned New York, but never Brooklyn; yet I could not be mistaken—she had said Brooklyn plainly. And what did she mean by *call*, and who was Betty? When she came to, I intended to get an explanation, if I could. Could it be that there was another American on Venus, whom she had seen and talked with? If I had reached the Shepherd Star, another might have done so. Perhaps he had been a prisoner here, may be an offering with whom she had talked before he died. I must find out! But what good it would do me, other than to satisfy my curiosity, I did not know; for was I not to die on the morrow?

Thinking thus, I fell asleep.

It was morning when I awoke. I was alone. Loto was not in the cage, and the door was still securely locked!

I AWOKE Jonda, but he could give me no information. He was as much mystified as I. Something tells me that I shall never see Loto again and that I shall carry this unsolved mystery to the grave with me.

Shortly before noon Brokols commenced filing past our cages. They were going toward the "bull ring" that Jonda and I had once cleaned. Many of them stopped and looked at us, commenting, usually in a most uncomplimentary manner, upon our looks and antecedents.

Presently they came for us—a couple of dozen warriors. I wanted to use my pistol, but I decided to wait until we got in the arena and I could wreak greater havoc.

The warriors were much concerned and not a little upset by the absence of Loto. They saw that the lock of the door had not been tampered with. When they asked me how she had escaped, I could only say that I did not know. They took us to the arena, which was crowded with Brokols. It was very quiet, nothing like a Spanish bull ring or an American base ball game when they have a large audience. There was little conversation, no cheering, no shouting. When Duma entered with his family and entourage, the place was as quiet as a tomb.

Jonda and I were standing in the center of the arena with our guards, one of whom left us and went and spoke with Duma. Presently he returned and said that Duma wished me to come to him. Half the guards accompanied me.

"What became of the woman?" demanded Duma, overlooking the fact that I had not bowed to him either four times or once.

"That is a stupid question to ask me," I told him.

Duma turned the color of a green lime.

"You must know," I continued, "that if I did know, I wouldn't tell you. I don't know, but if I told you that, you would not believe me. No, I don't know; but I can guess."

"What do you guess?" he asked.

"I guess that you can't hold a goddess behind bars," I said, "and I also guess that she has gone to arrange punishment for you and Ro-ton for the way you have treated her. You were very stupid to treat the Most High More Than Woman of the Fire the way you did."

"It was Ro-ton's fault," said Duma.

Ro-ton was there and he looked very uncomfortable, and when Duma said again,

"It was all Ro-ton's fault," he couldn't contain himself.

"You wanted to be the Most High More Than Man of the Fire," he blurted. "That was your idea, not mine. If she comes back, she'll know whose fault it was."

"Goddesses always do," I said. "You can never fool 'em."

"Take him away!" snapped Duma. "I do not like him."

"I think I hear her coming now," I said, looking up in the air.

Immediately Duma, Ro-ton, and all those around them looked up. It was a very tense moment, but no Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj appeared. However, I had upset their nervous equilibrium; which was all that I hoped to do; though it wouldn't have surprised me much if a girl who could have disappeared so completely and mysteriously as Loto had the night before had suddenly materialized carrying a flaming sword. However, she didn't; and I was haled back to the arena center.

JONDA bowed to me seven times. Jonda has a sense of humor, but the Brokols haven't. There was a hissing noise, as though thousands of people had gasped simultaneously; and I guess that is exactly what happened; then the silence was deathly.

Duma shouted something that I could not understand, drums were beaten, and the warriors left us alone in the center of the arena.

"We are about to die," said Jonda. "Let's give a good account of ourselves."

Two warriors came out and handed us each a spear, or gaff, and a sword.

"See that you put on a good show," said one of them.

"You are going to see one of the best shows ever put on in this arena," I told him.

When the warriors had retired to places of safety, one of the small doors in the arena wall was opened and six nobargans* came out. The nobargans are hairy, manlike cannibals. They have no clothing nor ornaments; but they fight with slings, with which they hurl stones; and with the crudest kind of bows and arrows.

The nobargans came toward us, growling like wild beasts, from which they are not far removed. If they were proficient with their slings and bows, our gaffs and swords would offer no defense. We'd never be able to get close enough to use them.

I threw down my gaff and drew my pistol, carrying the sword in my left

hand to use to fend off the missiles of the savages. Jonda wanted to barge ahead and get to close quarters, but I told him to wait—that I had a surprise for him, the nobargans, and the Brokols; so he dropped back at my side.

The savages were circling to surround us as I raised my pistol and dropped the first one; then all I had to do was pan, as the photographers say. One by one the creatures went down. Some missiles flew by our heads; and three of the beast-men had time to charge us, but I dropped them all before they reached us.

Utter silence followed, and endured for a moment; then I heard Duma raving like a madman. He had been cheated out of the sport he had expected. There had been no contest, and we had not been killed. He ordered warriors to come and take my pistol from me.

They came, but with no marked enthusiasm. I told them to stay back or I would kill them as I had killed the nobargans. Duma screamed at them to obey him. Of course there was nothing else for them to do; so they came on, and I dropped them just as I had the savages.

The Brokol audience sat in absolute silence. They are the quietest people! But Duma was not quiet. He fairly jumped up and down in his rage. He would have torn his hair, had he had any. Finally he ordered every armed man in the audience to enter the arena and get me, offering a splendid reward.

"Good work!" said Jonda. "Keep it up. After you have killed all the inhabitants of Brokol, we can go home."

"I can't kill 'em all," I said. "There are too many of them coming now. We'll be taken, but at a good price."

THOUSANDS of armed men were jumping over the barrier and com-

*The derivation of the word nobargan is interesting. Broadly, it means a savage; literally, it means hairy men. In the singular it is nobargan. *Gan* is man; *bar* is hair. *No* is a contraction of *not*, meaning with; and is used as a prefix with the same value that the suffix *y* has in English. So *nobar* means hairy, and *nobargan*, hairy man. The prefix *kloo* forms the plural (hairy men) savages. Throughout this narrative the English form of plural is used as a rule, as the Amtorian is quite awkward; in this case, *kloonobargan*.—Ed.

ing toward us. I can't say they were hurrying much. Everyone seemed to be quite willing to let some one else win the reward; but they were coming, nevertheless.

As they were closing in on us, I heard a familiar sound above me. But it could not be true! I looked up; and there, far overhead, circled an aeroplane. It could not be true, but it was. As far as I could see it, I could recognize that ship. It was the anotar—my anotar! Who had repaired it? Who was flying it? Who else could it be but Duare, the only other person in all this world who could fly an aeroplane.

"Look!" I cried, pointing up. "She comes! Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj comes for vengeance!"

Everybody looked up. Then they turned and looked at Duma and Roton. I looked at them, too. They were beating it out of that arena as fast as they could go. I'll bet they're running yet.

The anotar was circling low now, and I was waving wildly to attract the attention of Duare, or whoever was in it. Presently Duare leaned out and waved.

I called to the Brokols to fall back out of the way or be killed by the bird ship coming with a new Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. I thought they might notice too soon that Duare was not the original Loto. They made room in a hurry, scrambling out of the arena and leaving the stadium as fast as they could go.

Duare landed in the arena—a beautiful landing—and a moment later I

had her in my arms. I would have done the same thing had we been on the corner of 42nd and Broadway.

Doran was in the ship with her, and a moment later Jonda was in and I was at the controls with Duare at my side. We were both so full of questions that we almost burst, but eventually I learned that one of Kandar's first acts after he became jong of Japal was to send a strong body of warriors to Timal to bring Duare and Artol back to his court. He also, following my instructions, had had a new propeller made for the anotar. Knowing that I had been captured by the Brokols, they knew where to look for me; though they had little hope of reaching me in time.

We were flying at a couple of thousand feet altitude when I looked back at Jonda. He was gazing around and down, wide-eyed with excitement.

"What do you think of it?" I asked him.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I think Ka-at was right—you are the greatest liar in the world."

Editor's Note:

Not that it has any bearing on this story, but just as an example of a remarkable coincidence, we want to reproduce here a news item that appeared in the daily press recently.

Brooklyn, Sep. 24. Special Correspondence.

The body of Betty Callwell, who disappeared twenty-five years ago, was found in the alley back of her former home here early this morning. The preservation of the body was remarkable, as Miss Callwell must have been dead for twenty-five years. Friends who viewed the body insist that it did not look a day older than when she disappeared. The police fear foul play and are investigating.

FIRST ON THE SPOT

WE in America are not only the best informed people in the world, but very often we hear European speeches even before they are heard by the audiences to whom they are addressed. Here's how this curious phenomenon is explained. If Goering, for example, is speaking to an audience in a vast hall

in Berlin, we who are tuned in on his words by short-wave radio hear them before they reach his listeners in the rearward sections of the hall. This is because his voice travels at a speed of about one thousand feet a second, while short waves travel at a speed of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second.



"Migod!" gasped Gus. "It's a little man—it's you in miniature!"

MURDERED— YET ALIVE

by Jep Powell

Dashiel traversed space via etherwave, and arrived twenty pounds underweight. Then a tiny Dashiel followed—and trouble began!



PERCY peered anxiously through a peep-slot into a coffin-like atom assembler and an expression of satisfaction lit his tense face. His assistant stood by with a pulmotor. Percy threw back the lid of the coffin and the two of them bent over a lank, cadaverous figure. They worked silently.

"Okay, Gus, he's coming around," Percy said presently.

Alexander "Dash" Dashiel, erstwhile crack pilot of the space lanes, began breathing evenly. Muscles twitched here and there. Brown eyes fluttered open and he stared hazily around.

"Where—?" he asked in a weak, dry croak, tugging at an unruly reddish-brown forelock.

"Esterport. Esterport, Jupiter," Percy smiled. "More specifically, in the secret test station of Telatom Transport, Incorporated. And welcome to our city."

"Oh," Dash said with dawning understanding. "So I made the radio trip okay."

It had been a long chance, and a desperate one, for Dash. Once a famous pilot of the spaceways, he had been demoted and finally grounded forever because of his weakness for the insidious Saturnian loco-berries. He had gravitated to a point where no space ship would sign him on, not even the most disreputable old tramps. Washed up—though he was just beginning his middle thirties.

A few days ago he was a hopeless bum. Then came the weird offer from Telatom. It promised rehabilitation—or death. He had snatched at the offer; agreed to make the secret test flight by atomic projection. No publicity attended his departure from Earth. As a part of the plan, he firmly dated himself by becoming conspicuously drunk in several familiar Chicago hangouts. Then he was whisked secretly to Toledo, where he silently bade the world goodbye and stepped into the awesome atomizer. Now he was sitting on top of the world.

He was the first to travel from Earth to Jupiter—anywhere, for that matter—by electric beam. He was to receive a tidy little fortune from Telatom for his perilous venture. An even bigger fortune would come from personal appearance tours, advertising testimonials and in other ways.

"Well, what are you staring at?" he demanded. He was as naked as a peeled, hard-boiled egg. "Where are my clothes?"

"Right through that door." Percy pointed. "You'll find suit, shoes, shirts, everything. We got them as soon as your sizes were flashed to us."

Gus cocked an attentive ear and hopped to the receiver controls.

"Say, there's something else comin'," he declared.

"Impossible!" Percy said. "They wouldn't dare shoot anything else this

soon." He stopped and listened to a hissing, crackling sound. "Well, damn their crazy souls! Probably testing again with a rabbit or something. A couple of minutes sooner, and they would have gummed up everything. If Frank Hoyt was here he'd get them told. Where the hell is Hoyt?"

DASH stormed into the room in a suit that swallowed him.

"What kind of prank is this?" he demanded.

"It's the size you ordered," Percy declared.

Dash glowered up at Percy.

"How tall are you?"

"Five-eleven."

Dash swallowed hard and paled.

"Then—then I've shrunk. Shrunk at least two inches. I was an even six feet."

"Hey, Perce!" Gus shouted, eyes glued to the peep-slot in the assembler. "This ain't no rabbit. It's a human bein'. A brat."

A few minutes later a tiny man sat up in the assembler and blinked in bewilderment into three equally bewildered faces.

"Holy Moses!" Gus gasped. "He's a spittin' image of the other'n."

"Wh—who are you?" Dash gulped.

"Dash Dashiel," the little fellow piped with some misgiving as he stared at the larger Dash Dashiel. He fingered a stray forelock.

Frank Hoyt strutted in with the air of a man trying to look like a busy executive. He was a paunchy, beady-eyed, middle-aged man who smiled only with his mouth—the left side of it.

"Dashiel!" he greeted. "Congratulations! I knew it couldn't fail. Telatom is made! We're all made. Wait'll old Billy Smith hears about it. I'd like to see his face. The old walrus. Thought he had a strangle-hold on atomic travel,

did he? We'll relegate his shiny fleet of space ships to the limbo of the ox-cart. We'll put the old coot out of business. We'll—er, what's the matter?"

Wordlessly, Dash pointed to the naked little Dash.

"He says he's me," Dash muttered weakly.

"I am!" little Dash chirped.

Slowly Hoyt's astonishment changed to consternation.

"Dammit to hell!" he blared. "I've done everything but pray to have you projected safely through space—and what do I get? Two of you! Two are as bad as none. Space travelers aren't going to patronize our projector if there's danger of arriving as twins. What am I going to do, cancel all the personal appearances and the publicity I've got lined up?"

He slumped into a chair.

"How did it happen?"

"God knows," Percy sighed. "Maybe something went wrong back in Toledo; or possibly some elemental disturbance interrupted the beam. But how he arrived in two installments, identical except in size, is too much for me."

"I've got to talk with Russell in Toledo," Hoyt decided. "Connect me from my private office." He strode out of the room.

Hoyt was gone several minutes. When he returned he found the two Dashes arguing over the matter of identity. Little Dash was wearing a large towel, Indian blanket fashion.

"Quit wrangling," Hoyt ordered. "I think I've got a solution. Now, listen, Dash—"

Both Dashes answered as one.

HOYT bit his lip, then a slow smile curled it. He addressed the smaller one.

"To avoid confusion, we'll call you Dot. How's that? Dash and Dot. Dot-Dash. Get it?" He seemed to enjoy his cleverness.

"All right, Dash," he continued. "You'll go on with the personal appearances as I had planned. We'll get you a new outfit. Shoes with built-up heels to make your height about right. I'll get the mayor to greet you here. You'll ride with him behind a police escort to City Hall. You'll make a speech there and receive the key to the city. Tomorrow night you'll be honor guest at the Explorer's Club. I'll get busy with the arrangements. We'll keep Dot out of sight and—"

"The hell you will!" Dot screeched. "What about my contract?"

Hoyt was thoughtful for a moment. Then,

"Write your signatures on separate pieces of paper. Get two pens, Gus."

Their signatures were identical.

"All right, I give up," Hoyt sighed with a gesture of resignation. He brooded a minute and a shrewd smile played at the corner of his mouth. "I'll figure a way out by tomorrow. Meanwhile, you fellows can sleep in a room here at the station. But right now you need some food, I guess. And something for Dot to wear till the stores open tomorrow. I'll have my chauffeur take you to a restaurant and he'll dig up some clothes for Dot. Call Lefty, will you, Gus?" He peeled two large bills from a fat roll, handed one to each Dashiel.

"What about the twenty-five grand?" they chorused.

"Which of you gets it?" Hoyt snapped. "I told you I would take care of all that tomorrow."

Lefty pushed his cap backward in what may have been a salute, and stood slouchily in the door. He was a large man with arms that dangled like an

ape's. He had the scarred face of a sparring partner in a heavyweight champion's camp. The face split into a smile of toothy gold.

"Lefty, these gentlemen are Mr. Dashiell," Hoyt said. "Figure that one out for yourself. You are at their service."

As they turned to look at Lefty, Hoyt drew a forefinger across his throat and pointed at Dot. Lefty nodded.

"**B**BETTER keep off the main stems," Dash told Lefty as they climbed into the sleek uranium sedan. "We can't afford to spoil the publicity set-up. Some of the space flyers may recognize me if we go around any of the regular hangouts."

"Me, too," Dot added.

"Don't worry," Lefty grunted.

The streets grew narrower and darker. Dot glanced into the rear-view mirror and caught an ominous leer from Lefty.

"Where you taking us?" Dot quavered suspiciously.

"You wanted to stay off the main stems, didn't you?" Lefty retorted. "It won't be long now," he added significantly.

Squalid, unlighted houses now were spaced farther and farther apart. Dim street lights shone only at intersections. The streets were deserted. Dot shivered and wrapped his towel closer around him, although the temperature in the domed city was quite comfortable.

The car slid by what seemed acres of gloomy junk-yard. Lefty stopped in the shadows of a deserted building. He stepped out of the car and there was a clank as he lifted a manhole cover. He snatched open the car door and peered in.

"C'mere, you!" he growled, reaching a long arm into the car and seizing Dot by the foot. He yanked Dot from the

seat and clapped a hand over his mouth to smother a shriek of terror.

Dash sallied out of the car and lit on Lefty's shoulders like a lioness defending her cub. His 160-odd pounds equalled nearly a quarter of a ton in the heavy Jovian gravity and Lefty went down under the weight. He dropped Dot. Dash hammered his fists into Lefty's scarified visage. Lefty's big arms closed in a bear-like hug and he rolled over, pinning Dash helplessly to the pavement. Dot was scurrying around looking for a stone to use on the chauffeur's egg-shaped head.

"Hold your hosses, fella," Lefty panted almost apologetically. "I'm just doin' you a favor. I could drop the little gink down there and slide the cover over 'im and nobody'd ever miss 'im. Then he couldn't crab your act."

Dash squirmed under Lefty's weight and shook his head.

"I've sunk pretty low," he admitted, "but murder's out."

"He ain't nothin' to you, is he?" Lefty demanded.

"No!" Dash snorted. Then, "Hell, I don't know."

"You're nuts," Lefty grumbled. "I got my orders and I'm gonna keep 'em. I'll take care of the little shrimp and you won't even have to see it, or know anything about it."

"Listen, you cold-blooded ape," Dash grated. "If you harm him, I'll have you and Hoyt and the whole crew behind bars."

Lefty eased his embrace slowly.

"Okay, mister," he said finally, "if you feel that way about it. If you want to let a shrimp spoil your act, that's your business. You fellas get back in the car and we'll get some grub and some clothes for the runt."

FRANK HOYT paced his office in restless rage. Dot Dashiell, a syn-

chromy in brown attire obtained from the children's department of an Esterport store, sat sullenly in a big leather chair, feet dangling half way to the floor.

"A whole day gone and we haven't moved an inch," Hoyt groaned. "All because you had to turn up."

"What's a day?" Dot reported. "It's only ten hours up here."

Hoyt almost strangled.

"What's a day?" he sputtered. "It's—it's precious. Every hour counts. Dash was seen in Chicago on Saturday night—"

"Sure I was," Dot interrupted.

"All right," Hoyt continued impatiently. "—seen in Chicago Saturday night. Drunk and disgusting around several familiar haunts. That was the last time Earth saw him—"

"Me!"

"Well, you, damn it! Now Dash Dashiell, whoever he is, is here days sooner than any space ship could bring him, yet we can't cash in on it because you want to tag along like a shadow." Hoyt released a deep, quivering sigh. "Now listen, runt, as soon as I hear from Toledo, I'll have a reasonable proposition to offer you. You'll take it, or—" He crooked his thumbs into hooks and gestured toward Dot's throat.

Dash swaggered into the room in a new brown outfit. He stopped, twisting a recalcitrant brown lock and glaring at Dot.

"You would get brown," he snorted.

"I always liked brown," Dot declared.

"And I suppose you like dark blue with a chalk stripe."

"Yeah," Dot admitted. "I got one like that. Did you?"

A choking noise came from Dash's throat.

An evil glint lighted Hoyt's eyes.

Identical tastes would breed hatred between them, he mused. Give them enough rope, that's all. Soon either could enjoy seeing the other murdered—tortured in the bargain. Give them more rope. But hurry!

"Now, fellows," Hoyt said unctiously. "You both have good taste. Remind me of, er, twins."

"Wha-a-a-t?" they blared.

Hoyt chuckled.

"You're so alike. It's distressing to see you quarrel. But I was just saying to Dot, er, I expect to hear from Toledo right away and I think we can get everything ironed out. While I'm waiting, why don't you go out and enjoy yourselves? Get in a better humor. Go to some obscu—, er, quiet little night spot where you won't be recognized. Lefty will know where to—"

Dot shivered.

"Lefty was a little, er, hasty last night," Hoyt continued in his oily tone. "But now that you fellows are sticking together, he wouldn't dare try anything. And he has my orders not to. Congenial chap, Lefty."

INTERASTRAL CLUB was a high-sounding name for the tawdry backstreet honkytonk where Lefty dined the problem guests of Telatom Transport. But the brochetted swamp-moles were done to a king's taste and the excellent teka wine warmed their insides to a pleasant glow. Lefty heaved a prodigious sigh and patted his stomach. His other hand guided a toothpick between his 18-karat molars. Then he reached into a pocket and pulled out a handful of shriveled locoberries. He swirled them in his palm and eyed his guests cunningly.

Involuntarily Dash and Dot reached toward the dried berries, then halted their hands. Dash wet his lips with

his tongue.

Lefty selected a berry, put it in his mouth and chewed tantalizingly. He dropped the other berries on the table.

Dash's hand inched forward.

"No!" Dot cried. "Don't touch 'em! You know what they did to you—to us—before. Don't—"

"Shut up!" Dash growled. He scooped up several of the berries, popped them into his mouth and chewed avidly.

The Callistonian twist band played with a frenzy that would make a Harlem jam session seem like a chamber musicale by comparison. One of the hostesses, a willowy, honey-blond Earthgirl, paused questioningly at the table.

"M-m-m-m!" Dash and Dot said in unison.

She gave a provocative little twitch.

Dash bolted out of the booth and swept her away. Dot sulked in silence as he watched them gliding gracefully across the floor in long, sweeping strides. He'd have to use stilts to look down into her violet-blue eyes as Dash was doing.

Lefty gulped down a goblet of teka and looked the place over for another Earthgirl. They were scarce, not one was available. A plump little Jovian half-breed caught his eye and skipped up to the table. With the pert brunette wig that covered the nut-like shell of her head, false eyebrows and lashes, and expert make-up, she resembled an Earthgirl closely.

"Not ba-a-a-d," Lefty announced after a brief scrutiny. He stumbled out of the booth and towered over her. They shuffled off.

A blue-skinned Venusian cutie sidled into the booth with an undulating movement.

"Leth danth, Honee," she lisped through her forked tongue.

"Ugh!" Dot said, avoiding her round, fishy eyes. "Go away."

The evening was young but the fun was in full sway. Nights are short on Jupiter and frolics begin in high gear. There is no time for warming up. Gaiety threatened to lift the roof of the Interastral Club but it only added to Dot's misery as he sat alone in the booth. Dash and his blonde whirled past and Dash flung back a tormenting sneer.

Dot shrank deeper into his gloom. He eyed the loco-berries longingly. His fingers drummed nervously near the berries. He withdrew his hand with a supreme effort.

Dash and the blonde Earthgirl came to the booth for a drink of teka.

"O-o-o-o-o," the girl said, flashing a dazzling smile at Dot. Then to Dash, "Your little boy?"

"Hell no!" Dot shrieked.

"Oh, brothers," she assumed.

Dot grunted an unintelligible answer.

"I think you're awful cute," she cooed. "Come sit on Mimi's lap and let's make a loving cup of this goblet."

Dot bristled, changed his mind, accepted.

Dash glowered. Dot grinned at him evilly and made a noise like the ripping of canvas.

Mimi did a giggle that ran up the scale.

"Little mans got great big kiss for Mimi?" she asked teasingly.

Dot buried his lips in the highly-rouged pucker proffered.

DASH leaped to his feet, upsetting the table with a clatter of dishes and silverware. Four shell-headed Jovians sprang from nowhere and propelled the furious Dash speedily to the door. Brawls were frequent in the Interastral and capable bouncers knew how to nip them in the bud.

Lefty deserted his wriggly Jovian dumpling, caught Dot up under an arm, tossed a banknote to the cashier on the way out and joined Dash outside the door.

"Whatcha tryin' to do, attract attention?" Lefty growled. "Can't you take it if your gal plays up to the little gink?"

Dash shot Dot a poisonous glance through dilated pupils. Dot backed away uneasily.

"Where to now?" Lefty asked with mock politeness as he opened the car door. "Like to just catch a little air?"

The Dashiels doubled sat in strained silence as Lefty piloted them around the city. Occasionally he pointed out something of interest.

The car slowed down suddenly.

"Say, there's a street carnival," Lefty announced. "I ain't been to one in a coon's age."

"To hell with it," muttered the Dashes.

Ignoring them, Lefty swerved to the curb. He jumped out and opened the door. Childish excitement shone on his face.

"I like to throw baseballs at them shell-headed Jovian dodgers," he grinned. "Hope they got a dodger concession. I used to be a pretty good fireballer back in the Three-Eye League."

Unenthusiastically they followed him to the carnival lot.

Dot stopped short in front of a freak show. The barker was pointing to a pretty blonde midget on a platform. He called her Princess Teeny. She was smiling into the multitude of gaping faces but a wistful expression lurked in her large hazel eyes.

"Ain't she darlin'?" a red-headed Earthwoman cried.

Dot agreed silently.

"She is a cute little trick," Dash mut-

tered. "I could go for her if she was bigger."

"Come on," Lefty urged. "Let's find them dodgers."

Dot stood firmly and gave him an appealing look.

"Ho-ho!" Lefty hooted. "He's fallin' for the dwarf. Ouch!"

Dot had given him a vicious kick on the shin.

"Okay, pee-wee, you can go in an' see her," Lefty chuckled. "We'll all go in."

Inside the tent, instead of following the spieler who led the crowd on the round of freaks, Dot marched straight to Princess Teeny's little section. Lefty kept an eye on him.

TEENY was seating herself at a miniature desk to autograph postcard photos. She looked up and saw a small but tense face peering through a flap in the four-foot-high cheap plush curtain that surrounded her.

"May—may I see you?" the tense face stammered.

Her surprised look melted into a charming smile. She came to the curtain flap to greet him.

"Hello," she said, offering her hand. Her voice was a tiny golden bell.

"Ulp," was all Dot could say, but he said it eloquently. He tried again, but he was as tongue-tied as a flustered schoolboy. Suddenly he realized he was still holding her hand. He let go of it as he would a hot potato.

Teeny smiled reassuringly.

"Are you joining the show?" she asked. There was a hopeful tone in her voice.

"No, I—I just saw you out there." He jerked his thumb toward the entrance. "I—I thought you looked unhappy."

Her eyes dropped, then came up with that same wistful expression.

"I'm not very happy. It's—well, long hops, strange places, strange faces. People staring. Always people staring. And having to live and eat and travel with—with freaks. I used to be with a midget troupe. It was nice then. But I'm the only midget with this outfit."

Sympathy crept into Dot's eyes.

"But some day I'm going to get away from all this," she said with a far-away look. "I'm saving my money. Maybe I'll be able to buy a little home somewhere—somewhere away from people. I'd like to live in the country. Raise chickens." She smiled again. "Would you like my picture?"

She went to her little desk, nibbled pensively at the butt of her pen, smiled, then wrote: "Till we meet again—Teeny."

Dot dug into his pocket as she handed the card to him.

She shook her head.

"No. It's a present from me because I think I like you. And I autographed it 'specially for you."

The spieler was leading his mob their way. Dot glanced hastily at the autograph.

"Geel! Thanks," he breathed.

"And what is your name?" Teeny asked.

Dot's answer was drowned by the raucous voice of the spieler. He was swept aside by the mob without a chance to say goodbye.

LEFTY was in high glee as he drove back toward the hideout. He had bagged two of the shell-headed dodgers, sending one of them to the hospital with a cracked cranium. But his passengers were uncongenial. Dash was still grumbling about the night club episode. Dot was thinking about a pair of hazel eyes and a chicken farm.

Lefty also lapsed into silence. He

slumped in his seat and eased up on the accelerator. Suddenly he came to attention and snapped his fingers. A crooked smile split his unhandsome face and he drove furiously for the hideout.

"Say, Big Fella, I got a swell idea," Lefty said as he stopped in front of Telatom's secret station in a dilapidated warehouse. He twisted around in his seat. "I got a way to get rid of the little guy without harmin' hide or hair of him. You can 'arrive' tonight and the boss can get busy with all the publicity stunts. Everything'll be—"

"Hey, wait a minute!" Dot screeched. "You can't—"

"Shut up!" Dash barked. "What's the plan, Lefty?"

"We'll just turn 'im over to that freak show we was at."

"The hell you will!" Dot yowled.

Lefty lunged over the seat and his hairy hand closed over Dot's windpipe. Then he stuffed a dirty handkerchief into Dot's mouth. He snatched off his tie and completed an effective gag.

"That'll hold 'im for a spell," Lefty grunted, yanking Dot to the front seat and holding him in one arm. "Now you don't have to take no part in it, Big Un. I take 'im down to the carnival and turn 'im over to the freak collector. I ought to get a little piece of change out of 'im; and maybe the boss'll slip me a bonus. But I'll make the side show man agree not to show the runt till the outfit's away from Esterport, maybe off the whole planet."

Dash fumbled with a cowlick as he considered.

"He won't get hurt or nothin'," Lefty continued almost pleadingly. "He'll make a good living with the show. And, if he turns up a few months later and claims he's you, everybody will say he's a screwball. Sound okay?"

"Yeah," Dash said. "Sounds okay."

"Be still, pee-wee," Lefty muttered. "You'll get a chance to see plenty of that half-pint twist. You got nothin' to squawk about. And you, Big Un, you better call the boss and tell 'im everything's all set. You can get 'im at the Terra Arms. He'll probably hop right over here. I'll be back as soon as I put the runt in the show business."

Dash started toward the gloomy warehouse. He turned and came back.

"Good luck, punk. You brought it on yourself," he said to the squirming Dot. Then to Lefty, "Got a few of those berries left?"

FRANK HOYT'S fingers tapped an angry tattoo on his desk.

"You're crazy," he snapped. "You'll get what your contract calls for, and not another damned dollar."

"You'll pay me double," Dash insisted, "Or—"

"Or what?"

Dash's dilated pupils gleamed cunningly through narrow slits. He tugged nervously at a moist, reddish-brown ringlet. A corner of his mouth twitched.

"How would you like it if I spilled the story about arriving here double? How far back would that set the opening of Telatom's transportation service. I could locate the runt, and we would prove—"

"The old double-cross, eh?" Hoyt rasped.

"Who the hell are you to talk about double-crossing?" Dash spat at him. "You stole your atom projection secret from Old Man Smith when you were working for him, didn't you? And now you're using it to put him out of business. Maybe he'd be interested in my story, if you don't come across."

"You dirty, blackmailing louse!" Hoyt hissed. "We picked you up out of the gutter and gave you a chance to get on your feet again. Now you try

extortion. We should have known better than to pick a berry-munching hophead when reckless bums are a dime a dozen."

"Then hire yourself a bum," Dash goaded. "Hire a dozen. Even if all of them make the trip okay, people will still be skeptical about your service after what happened to me."

"No they won't, Dashiell," Hoyt said slowly. Rage faded from his face, replaced by calmness of grim decision. "They won't know anything about you." His hand came from under his desk. It held a snub-nosed automatic. His finger tightened on the trigger.

A SHORT, thin man with handlebar mustaches knocked at an office door of Telatom's dismal warehouse. He was flanked by two hulking, bull-necked men. Another person, hardly more than a yard tall, stood behind them.

The door opened and Lefty squinted into the darkness.

"I'm looking for Frank Hoyt," the mustached man announced.

"He ain't here," Lefty said after a moment's pause. He poked a revolver through the door. "Get the hell away."

A blackjack cracked Lefty on the knuckles and his pistol dropped. Another blackjack crashed down on his head in time to cut short his yelp of surprise. Lefty slumped silently to the floor. The mustached man kicked the fallen pistol out into the darkness. The four figures moved into the building and crept stealthily down a long, dimly-lit hall. They stopped at an open door.

Inside the room Frank Hoyt, Percy and Gus were crouched over the coffin-like atom assembler. There was a low humming in the coffin. The three were so engrossed in the business at hand they had not heard the scuffle at the warehouse front, the steps in the hall.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the mustached man said softly.

The three startled men swung around.

"B-Billy Smith!" Percy gasped.

Billy Smith, transportation tycoon whose space ships served every port in the Solar system, twirled his white mustaches with caressing fingers. A smile played on his lips but his grey-blue eyes were diamond hard.

Hoyt dived for his automatic that lay on a nearby chair.

"Better shoot fast and straight," Smith said coolly, folding his arms. "If you get me, Mumbo and Jumbo here will tear you to pieces—tiny pieces." He glanced at his gargantuan bodyguards.* "If you miss me, I'll take that gat and pistol-whip you to a pulp."

The cocky little old man strode calmly toward Hoyt.

Hoyt's hand wavered and he let the pistol drop to his side. "What do you want, Mr. Smith?" he asked sullenly.

Smith took the automatic and flung it scornfully into a corner.

"Is this the way to greet a competitor, Frank? Where's your hospitality?" Smith taunted in mock rebuke. "Receiving another test passenger?"

The humming in the coffin stopped and Hoyt breathed a fluttering sigh of relief. Smith's gaze fell upon Dash's bloody clothes beside the atom assembler. His eyes bore into Hoyt's.

"H-m-m-m-m," he murmured. "So

that's the way it is. First a little larceny, and now it's murder. That assembler can also serve as an atomizer. And you've just been using it to get rid of the corpus delicti; puff it out into space. Smart, eh?"

He worked his lips as if he had a bad taste in his mouth, then spat on the floor. He raised his voice to a thunderous bellow.

"But not smart enough, Rat! The whole gang of you are rats—dirty, sneaking, yellow rats!"

He eyed each of them with silent scorn, then grew calm again.

"Thought you could outsmart me, eh Frank? As my trusted employee, you knew I bought the secret of atomic projection and failed to patent it. You recognized it as the greatest advancement in the history of transportation, so you decided to steal it; make millions for yourself; put me out of business.

"You thought my failure to patent the secret was an oversight, didn't you, Frank? Well, it wasn't. I might have used it and made enough money to snap my fingers at junking my own fleet of ships. But the method is too revolutionary. The universe is not yet ready for it. I bought the secret to protect the transportation industry, to protect my employees, such as you, Frank, and even the employees of my competitors. That's something you couldn't understand, you self-centered skunk."

Hoyt's eyes darted toward the door, where Lefty stood gripping his recovered revolver.

"Let him have it!" Hoyt screamed.

MUMBO and Jumbo moved like twin bolts of lightning as Lefty's pistol roared. Lefty went down under Mumbo's titanic bulk. He fired again but the bullet went wild as a huge fist smashed into his face. Mumbo continued to belabor the already uncon-

* The inhabitants of Jupiter, in order to withstand the tremendous gravity of that world, have evolved by environmental influence to tremendous creatures with great density of body structure, and having bones as strong and unbreakable as steel. Earthmen on Jupiter must use anti-gravity shields in their dwellings, and wear gravity-repeller belts when out-of-doors. This is accomplished by a reversal of the force of gravity, associated with magnetism, to the extent of some 40%, which would make a 200 lb. man (Earth Standard) weigh only approximately 250 lbs. If he did not, he would weigh nearly five times as much, and the weight of his body would break his bones.—Ed.

scious chauffeur, battering his face into an unrecognizable mess.

Jumbo stood with his back to his master, stoically plucking at a slug that had flattened itself against one of his steely ribs.

"I've got some iodine in the car. We'll fix that up in a jiffy," Smith said to the silent Jumbo, slapping his shoulder in a grateful gesture that the giant understood.

"As I was saying, Frank," the old man continued evenly, as if nothing had happened, "you weren't so smart. Oh, you were smart enough not to steal the original secret. You copied it. But I suspected you; had you tailed ever since the day you left my employ.

"I knew 'Boss' Russell was backing you; knew you were building stations in Toledo and here in Esterport. I knew you were about ready for a test projection, so I rushed here. En route here, I was advised by my American office that Dashiell was to be your human guinea pig. He beat me here by a day—at least, they did," he corrected, glancing at Dot. "My spotters located them tonight at that cheap night club. I learned about your cowardly man-hole episode after we rescued the little fellow from that side show."

He paused for breath after his long speech. Hoyt started to speak, glanced at the gory Lefty, and shuddered. Neither Percy nor Gus had said a word. Dot was staring with frank admiration at the vigorous old shipping tycoon.

"Yes, Hoyt, you're sunk!" Smith declared.

"You—you haven't got anything on us," Hoyt whimpered.

"Oh, no? I couldn't do anything about the theft of my secret, because it wasn't patented. I had to wait for you to make a slip. And, without the corpus delicti, a murder charge probably would fizzle. Any way, it wasn't

a thorough murder because Dash Dashiell still lives." He pointed at Dot. "That's where I've got you. He'll be the prosecution's star witness on a kidnaping charge. The freak show man also will testify gladly because he lost the money he paid to your chauffeur. And a kidnaping rap is as serious here as it is back in the U. S. A."

He waited for that to sink in.

"Now you're going to send a message to Russell, telling him Telatom is washed up. Then you're going to sign a little confession, Frank—I won't ever use it unless I have to."

While Hoyt wrote with halting strokes, Billy Smith dictated the long confession involving Hoyt, Percy, Gus, the inert Lefty, "Boss" Russell, and each member of Telatom's Toledo crew.

A snuffle attracted attention toward the atomizer where Dot squatted over the little heap of Dash's bloody clothes. There were tears in his eyes.

"What's the matter, sonny?" Billy Smith inquired.

"I—he was my own flesh and b-blood," Dot gulped sadly.

"That reminds me, Hoyt," Smith said. "You and Russell can forget about Dashiell's contract. He is in my employ now. I'll pay what you agreed to pay—twenty-five thousand, wasn't it?—and put him on my payroll."

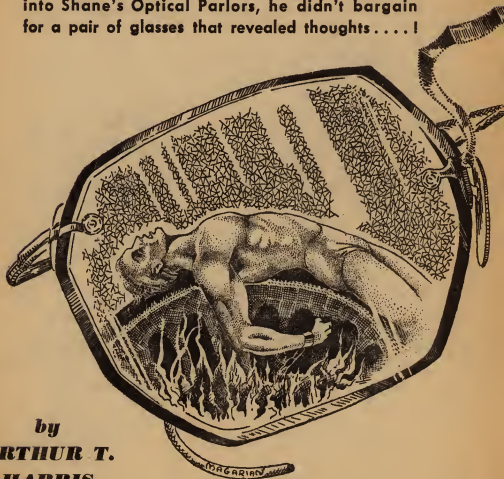
"Damn, Mr. Smith," Dot exclaimed. "You're sure a square shooter. You mean you'll give me a chance in your—?"

"Easy, Dash," the old man said. "You wouldn't exactly fit into a pilot's seat now, would you? You could buy some kind of business with the cash. Figure you could stay off the locoberries and run a business?"

"Yes!" said a resolute Dash Dashiell, tugging thoughtfully at a stray forelock. "And the business is going to be a poultry farm."

ABNER SCHLAP'S **STRANGE INSIGHT**

When Abner Schlap, mogul of Terminal City, went into Shane's Optical Parlors, he didn't bargain for a pair of glasses that revealed thoughts . . . !



by
ARTHUR T.
HARRIS

WITH dreadful finality, Abner Schlap, the Terror of Terminal City, barged commandingly through the portals of Doc Shane's Optical Parlors.

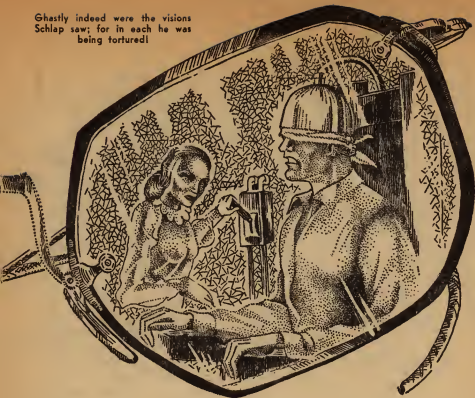
"I," announced Schlap with the voice of doom, "have come for my glasses."

Horace Heysead, Doc Shane's newly hired assistant, notched up his courage three and a half pegs and stammered,

"Oh, indeed? How nice of you to call on us, Major Schlap."

"Colonel Schlap!" thundered the proprietor of Terminal City, who had

Ghastly indeed were the visions
Schlap saw; for in each he was
being tortured!



once been a corporal in a boys' military school. "And I did not come to pay you a visit! I detest doctors and politicians—quacks, all of them! I might even detest you," he added ominously, "if you don't get me my glasses in a hurry."

"Oh, no, sir!" quavered Horace. "That would be awful! I'll see about your prescription at once. Dr. Shane is home, ill," he flung back over his shoulder as he scurried from the room.

"Ill, huh?" growled Abner Schlap. "I trust it's nothing trivial."

The frightened Horace was back in a few minutes with an attractively designed pair of spectacles. The lenses, as a timid beam of sunlight struck them, seemed for a moment to reflect an oddly phosphorescent glint, as though a rainbow had become imprisoned in a fortune-teller's crystal globe.

Schlap glared at the eyepiece suspiciously.

"This doesn't look like the frame I ordered," he snapped.

"Oh, but there must be some mistake!" Horace quivered. "These were laid out in Dr. Shane's special drawer for—er—important customers."

Schlap appeared slightly mollified.

"All right," he grunted. "I'll try 'em on."

For a man of such large and well-nigh formidable proportions, Schlap handled the glasses almost gingerly. He put them over his gimlet eyes. The spectacles hung awry; and with a simper of apology, Horace Heysead went to work.

"How is that, sir?" he asked after he had made one or two little adjustments.

"Uncomfortable!" Schlap snorted.

"Here, sir," Horace suggested, "watch my finger."

He moved the shaking member back and forth from the center of Schlap's nose. Schlap focused and unfocused his eyes blurrily, trying to follow the finger. Finally he impaled it with a dangerous glare. Yes—a man's finger, all right.

His eyes lifted abruptly to stare at the anxious Horace. And then Schlap started. He was looking directly into the eyes of Doc Shane's young assistant—and what he saw there was, to put it mildly, shocking.

Straight through the black pupils he looked—right through Horace's twitching eyeballs! But instead of seeing a collection of blood vessels, lymphatic veins and other unmentionable things, Abner Schlap beheld a miniature motion picture!

A motion picture, no less, of Horace Heysead's inner mental processes!

"Oh, God!" moaned Schlap piteously.

He closed his eyes weakly. But he couldn't get the dreadful vision out of them. He quaked like an aspen leaf, recalling the two characters in that hectic scene.

One of them had been Abner Schlap. He was stretched out on a rack, like a defenseless victim of the Inquisition. Only it was a 1941 rack. All aluminum, with sharp little spikes. On a bicycle-seat contraption had sat Horace Heysead. A wheel-and-sprocket gadget was attached to the rack.

Every time Schlap groaned, Horace made another gleeful turn of the pedal. Every time Schlap stopped groaning, Horace pushed a little switch, which sent sharp electric jolts through the sharper little spikes, on which Schlap was impaled.

Yes, indeed, it had all been perfectly frightful . . .

"Don't do it!" Schlap screamed. "I'll give you a half interest in my trolley company!"

Horace Heysead turned the color of salt.

"Can—can I get you a doctor?" he stammered hoarsely. "You seem a trifle upset."

"Upset!" screamed Abner Schlap horribly. "My God, man, I'm in a state of collapse!"

Tottering to his feet like a wounded moose, Schlap cast one more horrified look at the incredulous Horace Heysead and lurched fearfully to the street.

TEN minutes later, Abner Schlap sank like a stone into his office chair. He wiped his forehead with a big silk handkerchief. Then he pushed the first in a row of panel buttons.

Ten seconds later, a mouselike female fluttered like a dying hummingbird into the Great Man's sanctum.

"Miss Droope!" Schlap said anxiously. "Look into my eyes."

"Yes, sir," squeaked his long-suffering secretary. "Of course, sir."

Miss Droope, for all her beanpole figure, came of good stock. An ancient ancestor had come over on the *Mayflower*, or at any rate on a boat. The heritage of heroes flowered however nervously in the veins of Miss Belinda Droope.

But to Abner Schlap, that bloodstream was an icy torrent of murderous revenge.

"No!" he screamed. "You don't have to work Saturdays! I'll give you a raise! I'll—even—help—you—to—get—married! Only for God's sake, *don't torture me any more!*"

Miss Droope behaved quite normally. She let out an anguished howl and fled like a moth-eaten gazelle from her abject employer. She fled right out the door of Schlap's Golden Brewery

and down the main street to her room in Terminal City's oldest hotel. There Miss Droope buried her head in her bed covers and proceeded to shudder in tearful spasms.

Schlap also shuddered. For it was true, then. He didn't have the d.t.'s. Heaven forbid, although he was not in bad health, a *second* dreadful vision had come before him! Just the other day, his doctor had pronounced him sound. No; he, Abner Schlap, must be *bewitched* . . .

The movie had flashed on again. That dreadful mental movie, which undoubtedly came straight from the most secret recess of the human brain. The subconscious mind, perhaps.

But whatever it was, the scene had been virtually repeated—another torture episode. This time, instead of being spitted on an aluminum rack, Abner Schlap had been wound around the inside of an automobile clutch.

On all sides of the clutch was a magnificent roadster, and in the driver's seat, coyly depressing the clutch pedal, was Miss Belinda Droope.

The car was bowling gaily down a torn-up mountain road. Every time there was a particularly bad hole, Miss Droope let out the clutch and slowed the car. This meant that Abner Schlap was being alternately whirled on a flywheel and ground by friction into fat little bits.

It was, indeed, ghastly. It was even more disastrous when the Terror of Terminal City, coming to his senses, realized that Miss Droope had an incorrigible reputation as a gossip, and that before many hours he, Abner Schlap, would be known about town as a werewolf, a human cannibal and a man-made blitzkrieg.

AT the same time, further consternation was afoot.

Promptly at 10 a.m., a bare half hour after Colonel Schlap had begun the first of his morning trials, Professor Engelbert Snipe weaved lankily through the aforementioned portals of Doc Shane's Optical Parlors.

"Good morning!" he announced cheerily.

Horace Heysead, who had been scanning his favorite muscle-building magazine, while shivering every other moment at the *Affaire Schlap*, thrust the literary tonic behind the counter guiltily.

"Er—hello. I mean, good morning," he stammered. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"My good man," said Professor Snipe, "you can give me a new aspect on life. In fact, a most interesting aspect," he added with a sudden twinge of conscience. "Dr. Shane, I presume, has my prescription ready. The name is Snipe."

Horace's blue eyes widened.

"Oh, Professor Snipe! Yes, indeed. It was a special order, I believe. I'll be right out."

This, it must be admitted, was a white lie; for Horace did not return for a full fifteen minutes. And when he did, it was evident that he had been through the tortures of the damned.

"Professor Snipe," he quavered weakly, "I have made a dreadful mistake. I—I think I have mislaid your lenses. They just aren't anywhere around. But I'm sure we'll have them for you in the morning."

Snipe looked instantly startled.

"But you mustn't lose them!" he screeched. "They're very valuable. I've spent two solid years on the prescription for those glasses. If anything should happen to them— Oh dear, if someone else should get them by mistake! But of course that's impossible."

"Yes, sir," Horace nodded, ghastly

pale and in a complete fog. "Impossible . . ."

A frightened look came over Professor Snipe's face.

"My research—I mean, I shouldn't like to have it known just yet about my experiments—that is, if it is all right with you, young man—"

"Oh quite, quite!" Horace gushed with gales of relief. "Not a soul shall hear of this. Not even Dr. Shane," he added in a still small voice.

"Very well," breathed Professor Snipe. "I mean, it could be much worse—really, it could." And like the last rose of summer, he wilted wanly out the door.

Down the street he jolted, to the Miller House, the aforesaid ancient hostelry of Terminal City. Lurching corpselike up the rickety stairs, the professor let himself into his room—next door to that of Miss Belinda Droope's—which resembled nothing so much as the laboratory of a frustrated genius.

Prisms, charts, mathematical calculators, old boxes, scads of notepaper and several impossible-looking appliances littered this alchemist's den. The professor did not even glance at his precious apparatus.

Instead, looking over his shoulder at least twice, he stole across the threadbare carpet to his dresser, brought forth a nearly full bottle of Bourbon, raised the opening to his bluish lips and began a long and nervous gurgle . . .

Meanwhile, several blocks away, Horace Heysead, having scampered aimlessly about the optical store's workroom, had at last come to the terrifying conclusion that he had given Professor Snipe's glasses to none other than Abner Schlap!

questioned the mysterious properties of his new spectacles.

He had never worn glasses in his life. Yet the mere correction of one's vision surely did not conjure up a host of horrid hallucinations.

Just to be on the safe side, however, Schlap, squirming uncomfortably in his swivel chair, removed the glasses and leered at them with a jaundiced eye.

Hell, no. Glasses they were, and glasses they could not be anything else but. Besides, although the frame fit a bit snugly over his beetle-browed face, the lenses definitely improved his vision.

Snorting belligerently, Abner Schlap slapped the new cheaters back across his ears. Tommyrot, that's what it was; tommyrot! He'd been working too hard lately. Now that he recalled it, the doctor *had* said something about "nervous strain."

That was it. Lot of responsibility, running a whole town. Too much on his mind, Schlap decided. No wonder he'd been seeing things. All great men of affairs have to let down their hair occasionally. Even Napoleon had his lighter moments . . .

Feeling reassured and almost smug again, Schlap heaved himself to his feet, intending to drive out to his club for a round of golf and a few locker-room highballs.

Never was a holiday more cruelly interrupted. As Abner Schlap reached his office door, there was suddenly a great ringing of gongs, a flashing of red lights, and the hiss of sprinkler systems spurting away on a rampage.

"Fire!" someone yelled.

"Sabotage!" came a confirming shout.

"The Nazis have landed!" a frightened female yelled.

Into the midst of all this chaos stormed Abner Schlap. He sniffed the

BEING a stalwart but unimaginative soul, Schlap never for a moment

air suspiciously.

"Who started that damned rumor about fire—" he began.

Further bombast was unnecessary. With an earth-quaking roar, a boiler blew up, scattering three floors and a large section of the roof.

"Who," roared Abner Schlap, "is responsible for this time-bomb?"

No coward, he began herding scared employees toward the exit. When he finally reached the street himself, flames had enveloped Schlap's Golden Brewery with a vengeance.

Casting his eye angrily down the street, Schlap was just in time to see the Terminal City Fire Department, late as usual, come clanging to the rescue.

SEVERAL blocks away, Professor Snipe was rapidly becoming befuddled.

He had taken his swig of whiskey, returned the bottle to the dresser, dutifully washed out his mouth with cold water—and then, on second, third and fourth thoughts, had gone back for more little snifters.

"I am a ruined man," groaned the professor. "I shall drown my disgrace in forbidden spirits. If someone has made off with my precious lenses, the greatest discovery since Adam created Eve will be broadcast wholesale to a cruel and undeserving world!"

Unhappily the professor slumped in his old Morris chair. For two long years, he had labored in solitary grandeur in these proud but poverty-breathing surroundings. He had permitted nothing to distract him—not even the skinny but hopeful Belinda Droope, who had cast him many coy and admiring glances when they'd met in the hallway from time to time.

If the truth be known, the ultra-shy Professor Snipe, walrus mustaches and

all, had long harbored reciprocal sentiments in regard to Miss Droope. To put it bluntly, he hoped one day to offer her his hand—once his magnificent brainchild had come to life in a shower of golden coins.

For the thing was indubitably magnificent. It was, to be specific, the greatest advance in optics since Galileo had invented the telescope.

With these wondrous lenses, easily fitted into ordinary spectacle frames, anyone could look into the eyes of another—and read his every thought.

Not having the necessary grinding apparatus, Snipe had had to entrust his priceless prescription to Doc Shane's Optical Parlors.

The professor had first got the basic idea from his knowledge of brainwaves. The eye, he knew, is connected to the brain through the optic nerve, which transmits images recorded on the retina through the pupil.

Therefore, since it follows that brain and eye cooperate mutually, it must also be true, Professor Snipe reasoned, that thought-impulses—in particular, ideas generated by the subconscious mind—are themselves reflected back*

* Think of two mirrors. Place a lighted candle between them. Light rays will be reflected back and forth, from one mirror to the other. Similarly, then, there is no reason to suppose that the retina of the human eye is not a motion picture "screen." On this screen, thoughts are projected from the brain; if they could be read accurately, even a man with a "poker face" could not hide his inner emotions.

We speak of a man who "sees red." Actually, he isn't seeing anything visually, but his brain is seething with anger or indignation. That emotion is instantaneously conveyed back along the optic nerve and "screened" on the retina.

If we watch the fellow closely, we can detect the angry glint in his eye. We cannot tell just what action he is planning, because we do not have the proper apparatus to interpret his thoughts. We only know he is in a rage.

Therefore, in designing his precious lenses, Professor Engelbert Snipe knew that the secret formula which they contained would enable anyone to read another's mind.—Ed.

on the retina, the thought being conveyed through the regular eye-brain channel: the optic nerve.

But now, Snipe told himself between hiccups, all was lost, all. In his alcoholic miasma, strange visions began to cloud his weary brain.

From afar he heard the peal of an organ. Nearer it grew, nearer. Wonder of wonders! He, Engelbert Snipe, was suddenly in church. Not only in church, but draped on his skinny arm was the emaciated but happily smirking Belinda Droope.

Like two animated skeletons, the bridal pair proceeded awkwardly down the center aisle. They came at last to the altar. There was a man standing there, severely clothed in what might or might not have been ministerial vestments.

Oh God, Professor Snipe groaned, as Belinda shook in sympathetic panic, this was no minister. This was Colonel Abner Schlapp, the man who single-handed practically ran the miniature metropolis of Terminal City.

Schlapp stood there formidably; and then he began to read from an ominous little black book.

"I, Privy Councilor to His Majesty, King Satan of Hell," Schlapp began, "do hereby forbid this marriage—"

WITH a shrill scream, Professor Snipe woke up. A loud explosion reverberated thunderously in his ears. Snipe shuddered, as spilled whiskey fumed up from the overturned bottle of Bourbon.

He looked around, to find his arm entangled with a dust mop.

"Oh dear Lord," he moaned, staring at the mop. "And I thought you were Miss Belinda Droope! That's what I get for drinking. I'm just a will-o'-the-wisp, a ne'er-do-well, a soldier of fortune in the Army of Sin—"

Sounds of the ever-late Fire Department came clangorously from the street. Getting groggily to his feet, Snipe weaved to the window and stared out.

"My stars!" he muttered. "It's the Schlapp brewery, and— Oh precious saints!" the professor yelped. "Miss Belinda Droope works there!"

With a spasmodic gulp, Engelbert Snipe fairly flew out of the hotel, his funereal black suit flapping disrespectfully on his bones.

Had he glanced back, he might have seen the gaunt and excited figure of Miss Belinda Droope; who, having bolted for home but a few minutes before, was still shaking in righteous terror, after her sad episode with her employer, when the Schlapp boiler blew up.

Yards behind the agitated professor came Miss Droope, afraid that her very job was going up in flames. And behind Miss Droope came half the town, eager to see the fun.

TO Abner Schlapp, it was anything but a carnival.

"My brewery!" he stormed. "I've got insurance, but it's the principle of the thing! Enemy agents are behind this! I shall wire the Senate to declare war—"

He espied the approaching form of Chief Creepers, head of the Fire Department. Schlapp descended on the unfortunate fellow like all the seven furies.

"Creepers!" he snarled. "You're late again! My lovely brewery will burn to ashes and—"

Involuntarily Schlapp glared at the unhappy official. Glared straight into his eyes. Glared, and then shrank back, mumbling in abject terror and beginning to drool at the mouth.

It was horrible. It was ghastly. Worse, it was the truth! Outwardly,

the bodily proportions of Chief Creepers were trembling with fear. But inwardly—inwardly, in the secret recess of his much-abused soul, the doughty fire-fighter was seething like a four-alarm volcano.

Looking into his ordinarily mild blue eyes, Abner Schlap beheld a scene of utter horror. There was, he saw all too clearly, a handball court. At one end of the court, a heavy fat man wearing bathing trunks stood with his back to the wall.

In the center of the wall was a little door, just big enough to squeeze through. From every part of the door-frame protruded—razor-edged knives.

Facing the frantic victim stood a middle-aged, athletic man wearing asbestos gloves. Every ten seconds, he would reach down into a brazier full of blazing live coals and palm one in his hand.

Swish! With unerring accuracy, the live coal would head for the quivering body of the unprotected fat man. Always it would land, to sizzle on the bare flesh like steak on an open griddle.

And if the victim tried frantically to escape—there was only that narrow spiked doorway to go through.

The athlete, of course, was Chief Creepers, of the Fire Department. And the victim, scorched as a barbecued ham, was none other than Colonel Abner Schlap, the titan of Terminal City . . .

Sweating from every pore, Schlap backed away from the astounded Creepers, as hundreds of townsfolk gaped on the sidewalk.

"Mercy!" bleated Schlap. "I'll give you everything I own—I mean, ten percent! I—I take back all the nasty things I've called you! I'll see the city gives you a gold medal of honor! I'll—"

"He's gone nuts!" several onlookers

muttered simultaneously.

"Schlap is slap-happy!" observed a local pugilist.

"The Great Brain has collapsed!" cynically opined the editor of the Terminal City *Banner*, who had just arrived.

FOR Chief Creepers, it was even worse. For twenty years, Abner Schlap had presented himself at each and every fire. As the town's largest property owner, Schlap had always insisted on taking personal charge of the city's fire apparatus.

Therefore, Chief Creepers was now in a terrible pickle. It had been so long since he'd fought a fire on his own, he hardly knew what orders to give. Meanwhile, some twenty-five firemen stood around dazedly, waiting for the strident Schlap commands which never came.

As if in united accord, firemen and onlookers turned beseechingly toward Abner Schlap. The Terror of Terminal City returned their pleading stares with frightened eyes. His mouth continued to drool.

"Leave me alone, you nasty people!" he cried. "You're torturers, that's what you are—gangsters! Now go away and let me die in agony—I mean, in peace!"

This dreadful stalemate might have kept on until the Schlap brewery, and several other fine buildings adjoining, had burned to the ground, causing irreplaceable damage and the jobs of many hundreds, had Belinda Droope not arrived on the scene, to be followed like a lunging panther by Professor Engelbert Snipe.

"Mr. Schlap!" screamed Belinda Droope, courage mounting from her birdlike soul. "Your competitors are trying to ruin you! Snap into it, Mr. Schlap, and put out this fire! Snap

into it, Mr. Schlap!" she pleaded.

A split instant later, Professor Snipe skidded to a frantic halt. He misjudged the situation at a glance. He saw the cringing Abner Schlap, the excited, anxious, imploring Miss Droope, egging her boss on to direct action.

Snipe, of course, misinterpreted the whole scene.

"Abner Schlap!" he bellowed through his squeaky vocal cords. "Abner Schlap, you do NOT own this town! You will NOT let it burn to the ground! You will NOT drive Miss Belinda Droope to the brink of madness—and furthermore, sir, you will NOT prevent our marriage! I mean—"

"Let me alone!" shrieked Schlap, backing away hysterically from the angrily advancing professor. "Stop *persecuting* me!"

So saying, he made a frantic swipe with his arm. It brushed Snipe aside like a wind-swept willow. Snorting defiance, Snipe charged back into the fray like a spitting wildcat. He kicked, he screeched, and he made a wild scratching jab with his hand.

The scrawny fingers collided with Schlap's glasses. They knocked the spectacles off the Schlap face. Ten feet, the unoffending eyepiece flew, to land in a million little bits on the sidewalk.

This was too much for Abner Schlap. "You big brute!" he roared. "Kick a helpless man when he's down,"

He made straight for Professor Snipe. Snipe stood his ground courageously, knotting his small fists like two doorknobs in a doll's house. When the two men were only inches apart, Schlap glared bitterly, involuntarily into the other's eyes.

Then he started. His mouth flew open, and his own eyes read incredulously into the depths of his persecutor's soul.

There was no malice in the eyes of Engelbert Snipe. Anger, yes, but no hatred, no spirit of horrid revenge. Snipe was just like any other man who thinks he has been wronged.

More important, in his bright, defiant gray eyes was no vision of unutterable torture upon the prostrate body of Abner Schlap!

"HALLELUJAH!" Schlap yelped joyously. "I'm a free man! I haven't got the heeby-jeebies any more! Nobody's persecuting me—"

He realized then what he was saying; realized, too, that everybody for yards around thought him quite mad.

"Creepers!" roared Abner Schlap, once more the captain of his soul.

"Yes, sir," bleated the happy fire chief, recognizing his master's return to sanity.

"Creepers," commanded the rejuvenated Terror of Terminal City, "take this man"—he pointed to the still angry Snipe—"out of my sight. I will deal with him later. Apparently he has a grievance. I, Abner Schlap, deny justice to no man. Now, then, put out this fire!"

"Absolutely, sir!" nodded the overjoyed fire-fighter. "The usual way, sir?"

"The usual way," Schlap gestured imperiously. "Schlap methods have never failed."

Moments later, Abner Schlap was reminded of this axiom when he felt an anxious hand of his arm.

"Yes?" he rumbled deeply, turning. "Oh—Miss Droope. No, don't look so worried, Miss Droope. Everything is quite under control."

"But that gentleman over there—" Miss Belinda Droope blushed furiously as Schlap's eye followed her distraught gaze to the gaunt figure of Professor Engelbert Snipe, now engaged in strug-

gling futilely with a burly fireman.

"Oh," Schlap stared at him long and hard, seeming to recall that the two had once met. In fact, he seemed to recall quite a bit.

"Well, what about that human scarecrow, Miss Droope?"

"Oh, but he's not!" she protested anxiously. "I mean, that's the man who spoke up to you and brought you to your senses, and—"

"Enough!" commanded Abner Schlap in his most dignified manner. "As I understand it, Miss Droope, you are concerned about that—er—gentleman. You wish to have him released?"

"Oh, Mr. Schlap!" cooed the breathless Belinda Droope.

Promptly the order was given. A moment later, a thin and still flustered

man, in flapping black clothes, and an even thinner but radiantly blushing beanpole of a woman, could be seen making their way together down the street.

"Oh, Professor Snipe!" Belinda Droope gushed. "I'm *so* glad I happened along to rescue you from—er—from all that trouble! You know, Colonel Schlap really isn't such a bad person. It's just—well, sometimes I think he has the wrong aspect on life. You know—as if he were looking at things through the wrong pair of glasses."

"My dear," responded the professor, still wondering fearfully what would have happened had anyone, so he thought, found his precious lenses, "my dear, let's not even think of such things."



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CITY OF LOST SOULS

by Ralph Milne Farley and Al P. Nelson

“WARREN!” cried Hammersmith, as he thrust his shaggy head between my tent-flaps. “The desert chieftain, Mul-Lai and his blarsted Mauros have wiped out our garrison at Wacco. Two hundred Legionnaires and a hundred Martians!”

Hammersmith, a rangy red-haired Australian, with cold blue eyes, was the only Earthman to hold a commission in the Martian Foreign Legion; for all the other officers, and even some of the non-coms, were copper-skinned Martian aristocrats.

He eased his rangy frame into my tent and sat down at the foot of my canvas cot. Little Cedric, the Englishman, followed him in.

Three thousand Martian Legionnaires faced more than they could handle when they attacked the holy city of Daloss to rescue captured comrades

“It happened last night!” Cedric breathlessly added. “One of the survivors has just reached camp—he’s over at headquarters right now reporting to Colonel Ak-Ak. He says the Mauros fell on the little city at midnight and slaughtered nearly every man, woman, and child. Babies—little babies — torn from their mothers’

“I can kill the infidel now!” Warren heard her sob. “He deserves to die!”





breasts and slit open with swords. Oh, my God!" His boyish face was blank with horror.

Hammersmith's leathery jaw was set and grim. His blue eyes flashed in the light of my tent-lantern.

"That's not the worst of it. The dead are dead, but think of what's going to happen to our buddies who were taken prisoner. Ten of them! Dragged off to Daloss to be tortured and then burned alive on the golden altar as a sacrifice to the Dark Star, Erlik. One of them in particular!" His voice broke.*

Daloss. In spite of my horror at the fate of my comrades, I could not restrain a thrill at the magical spell of that name. Daloss, hidden deep in the fertile valleys between the ranges of the

mighty Fobian Mountains, was the age-old mystic city of the Mauros, a stronghold which bristled with guns and superstitions.

Here the worship of the Dark Star was most devout. Here plans were daily reviewed for the mighty holy war, which some day would find all followers of Erlik rising to wipe infidels from the face of the planet.

Scourge of Mars for generations, Daloss was known as the most holy city of the worshippers of Erlik. If a non-believer should venture to reach its borders, the curses of the dark religion, yea, the curses of Erlik himself would most certainly fall upon him. Disease and misfortune, like a raging storm, would seize the infidel *crraat*,* or would fill his soul with an evil dark spirit to torture him the rest of his days upon the planet, should he escape death from the Mauros themselves.

This city it was that the Martians dreaded to approach too rapidly, despite the despotic orders from the Capital city to seize the Mauro gold mines at any cost.

No believer in any other religion had ever come back from the holy city. Infidel captives were anointed with rare Martian perfumes, then burned alive on the great altar of gold in the Maadar, largest and most sacred of all of Erlik's temples. Then their ashes were scattered upon the fields, where the heavy hooves of lumbering oxlike Martian beasts of burden ground them into the soil, so that no trace of the unbelieving *crraats* might remain to taint the city of the Dark Star.

Truly a City of Lost Souls—Christian souls, Martian souls, doomed by incantation of Erlik's high priests to roam in misery over the red planet, pursued by evil dark spirits.

* The Foreign Legion of Mars (called Legion of the Damned by peoples of the other planets) is perhaps the most famous military group in history, not even excepting the French Foreign Legion of Africa, which was dissolved with the ending of the Second World War in Europe.

It boasts a history of one hundred years of bloody conflict, of victories and of defeats that can be equalled by no other fighting group on Mars or Earth, the only two worlds in the solar system where armies are maintained.

Like the Earth Foreign Legion, its members are mostly derived from the ranks of fugitives from justice, and from the adventurers of five planets. They are all a hard-bitten, careless, fearless lot, used to facing death.

And in the Martian Legion they do face death constantly. Nowhere in the system is there a planet where warfare rages more continually. This is perhaps because the peoples of Mars are comparatively few, and being segregated and isolated tribes, they develop a fierce animosity toward each other, which flares up into bloody battle at any chance meeting.

Fortunately these meetings are rare, since travel on Mars is a serious undertaking. Yet, periodically, migrations occur, when the site of a camp becomes too arduous, and then it becomes a matter of capture or defend a new site or what you already hold.

The Legion holds the unenviable position of being mediators (by the right of force) between migrating tribes, with the usual result that both tribes attack the Legion.

But of all Mars, Daloss, the holy city, alone has never bowed to the Legion.—Eo.

* "*Crraat*," a particularly repulsive desert rodent-like reptile.—Eo.

And yet there was a romantic side to this city of mystery. The tales which reached us from Daloss were not all horror. There were things to draw us there, as well as to repel us. For not only was there the fabulous wealth of its gold mines—but there were its women!

Little Cedric, the English boy, was telling us this. But somehow it went against my prejudices.

"Filthy wenches!" I snorted.

"Not all," said Cedric quietly.

Something in his tone caused me to look at him searchingly.

"Well?" I asked.

"There was one," the boy said dreamily. "Blue eyes, golden curls, skin pink and white like a sea shell. Her father was a very wealthy Mauro, and sent her to finishing school on Earth, in England. She was from Daloss. I'd like to see her again."

"A Mauro—as beautiful as that?" I exclaimed.

"A Mauro, not a gunmetal-blue Martian," said Cedric, with disdain, "nor a copper-red member of the Martian aristocracy. A Mauro, most of whom are white like ourselves. One of the reasons I came to Mars and joined up with the Legion, was the hope of seeing that little beauty again."

Then he went on to tell us of what he had heard of the midnight ritual of the City of Lost Souls.

IT was said that, on moonlit Martian nights, these beautiful Mauro women, shedding their flowing white shawls and silken tunics, roamed the streets of Daloss, to perform weird, naked, worshipful dances in honor of Erlik the Unspeakable, while hidden stringed instruments throbbed with wild barbaric music. Every male inhabitant cast his eyes upon the floor of his hut while these dances held sway,

for worthy only is Erlik himself to gaze upon so much naked loveliness.

A growl from Hammersmith snapped our minds back from these dreams, to the horrid fate awaiting our ten captured comrades.

"Who were they?" I asked. "Any whom we know?"

"Well, there's Gustav Schmidt," little Cedric began.

I shook my head. The name was not familiar.

"And Victor Lafontaine."

"Not Vic?" I cried. I knew him well, a lovable roly-poly Frenchman.

"And Hammersmith's own brother!"

So that was the reason for the catch in Hammersmith's voice a few moments ago.

"The others," the young Englishman ended harshly, "were not of our outfit."

"Well," I demanded, "what are we going to do about it?"

"The Legion is wild with rage!" Hammersmith declared. "You and Cedric are the two senior Sergeants—other than the Martians. I want you two to come with me to headquarters to talk to Colonel Ak-Ak."

"You're on!" I cried, jumping up and jamming my desert hat onto my head.

Together the three of us made our way to the whitewashed stone house, which served as headquarters and dwelling for the red Martian aristocrat, who was our commandant.

Colonel Ak-Ak, a gross swarthy Martian with long drooping moustaches, received us with an air of graciousness, and listened quietly to the suggestions of Captain Hammersmith.

"Sir," our Captain concluded—in Esperanto, of course, the official interplanetary tongue, "the men are eager to avenge this damned massacre, and to rescue their comrades from blood-

thirsty Mu-Lai and his savage Mauros. Is not this what you have been waiting and hoping for? An incentive to drive us to capture the gold-mines which the Capital City is anxious for us to seize?"

The Colonel seemed pleased at the suggestion, promised to take it up with the Staff early in the morning, thanked us profusely, and poured out some excellent wine—quite different from the rancid syrup, swimming with desert insects, which formed a part of our daily ration.

Then we returned to our encampment and spread the word of the rescue plans. The whole camp buzzed with excitement. Weird tales of the City of Lost Souls, and its beautiful women, were told far into that desert moonlit night.

Now at last we Legionnaires could look forward to a real war! No more mere slow skirmishing across the sun-baked red sands. No more cautious advances. Quick action, desperate action, decisive action would be necessary, if we would save our ten comrades.

NEXT morning we awoke—those of us who had slept at all—eager to set out for Daloss. But no call to the colors came. All through that sweltering day, we fretted and chafed beneath the boiling sun, watched the red haze of the mighty Fobian range, and waited.

We questioned the junior Martian officers and non-coms concerning plans for the advance. But they merely shrugged their shoulders.

"What are a mere ten men? And especially mere Earthmen, mercenaries?" they said, snapping their fingers. "Nothing, in a war like this. And the massacre? 'Tis but the fortunes of war, nothing more: a mere desert wind, which blows some good, some ill."

The Legion seethed. For with every minute that slipped by, rescue was becoming more and more difficult. So finally Captain Hammersmith and Little Cedric and I went back again to the Martian Colonel, Ak-Ak.

We intended to make demands—perhaps even to threaten a mutiny. But we never got that far. For, as we entered the Colonel's office, after cooling our heels in the outer room for an hour, we were set upon by a squad of men from one of the native Martian regiments.

"Seize—bind them!" shouted the swarthy red-skinned Colonel.

It would take more than eight Martian regulars to seize the three of us. Cedric and I dropped back several paces, and raised our fists to defend ourselves. But Hammersmith, our leader, seemed to slump with servility, as he meekly held out his wrists for the shackles.

Doubtless anxious to get him out of the way, before tackling Cedric and me, one of the native soldiers leaped forward, with the open handcuffs in both hands, ready to clap them on Hammersmith's wrists.

This was what Hammersmith had been waiting for. Lunging suddenly, he reached beneath the extended manacles, seized the soldier around the waist with both hands, lifted him aloft, and hurled him full in the faces of the others.

Then, our fists flying, all three of us waded in.

Through one corner of my eye, I saw Colonel Ak-Ak whip out his atomic pistol. I crouched low, and mixed up closer with the Martian soldiers, so that Ak-Ak wouldn't dare try to blast me. I heard several toots of the Colonel's whistle, and then more men came running.

It was a glorious fight while it lasted,

but at length we were downed, and our wrists and ankles firmly tied. Big, gross Colonel Ak-Ak twirled his long black drooping moustaches, his fat copper-hued face purple with suppressed rage.

"It may interest you crraats to know," he hissed, "that there will be no advance on Daloss. On the morrow, we retire to winter quarters at Ricca, there to await reinforcements for the spring campaign. *That* for your impertinence! Your comrades can rot in hell!"

He snapped his fingers; and strode, still bristling, from the office.

"Damn!" muttered Hammersmith to me, as the three of us were led away in the wake of Colonel Ak-Ak. "Now we've put our foot in it! Losing our tempers, when we needed to keep them at all costs. Poor brother, I have failed you!"

"Shut your face," snapped one of the guards, slapping him across the mouth.

We were led to the stinking guard-house and locked in separate cells, so that we got no chance of further conversation.

ALL the rest of that hot stifling afternoon, I worried about the fate of our ten captured comrades. But occasionally—I must admit—my thoughts wandered to the *attractions* of the City of Lost Souls, as well as to its *menace*. To the unlimited gold of its mines, and to its beautiful blonde Mauro maidens.

At last came evening, with its weird green shadows, cast across the desert's hot sands, its soft cooling winds, its vast desert beauty. Black batlike desert reptiles sped through the green darkness with eerie flapping of leather wings. Over the red desert lay a satisfying peace; but not on us three incarcerated ones, nor—so we later

learned—upon the rest of the Legion of Death. Time was fleeting, and there was an outrage to be avenged, and comrades to be rescued.

In the corridors of our jail, we heard the sound of scuffling—a muffled groan—a dull thud. Then cautious footsteps approached our cells.

"Captain Hammersmith! Sergeant Warren! Sergeant Cedric! Speak up, where are you?"

"Here!" we whispered in reply.

A furtive group of enlisted men from our own outfit unlocked our cell-doors, and then untied our wrists and ankles. Next they dragged in the Martian guards, bound and gagged, and left them in our places.

"What's up?" Hammersmith whispered, as we slunk through the green darkness, back toward our own outfit.

"The men have organized everything," one of our rescuers explained, "but we want someone to lead us. If you will take command, Sir, we're all set to fall upon the officers, truss them up, seize the sliths,* and then off to Daloss. What do you say, Sir?"

"It's a go!" the Captain exclaimed, his blue eyes glinting eagerly. "Who made the plans?"

"Zenoff, Duke Keating, Bloch, and Kuswa."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Send for them."

A few minutes of discussion with the plotters convinced him that the plans had been well laid. So he gave the word for action.

A single long low barking howl, like that of a crraat: this was our signal. Instantly every Martian officer and non-commissioned officer in our regiment was set-upon, gagged, and bound. Then we crept silently like dark shad-

* "Slith," a grey horse-like reptile, ridden by the Martian cavalry. Its splay feet enable it to travel with ease over the red desert sands, and it can go for long periods without water.—Ep.

ows toward the picket lines. Most of the guards were our own buddies; the few Martians we quickly overpowered.

We had saddled and mounted as the red disk of one of the two Martian moons climbed above the mountains, quickly shrinking and paling as it rose.

Leather creaked, sabers clanked in their scabbards; rifles were clasped in taut hands. Breath came in quick gasps; eyes flashed; faces were grim with determination.

Down the moonlit red slope we raced, past spiky argan trees, past a honey-combed slag bluff, and out onto the open desert. Past the encampment of the native portion of the Legion we rode. Bedlam broke loose among the tents that dotted the floor of the broad valley. Atomic rifles sizzled, and hoarse commands rose on the night air.

Then the whole three thousand of us were gone—vanished into the night before the sleepy fire of the waking Martians could become destructive. Only a few men were lost to us in that encounter.

THUNDERING over the desert toward the distant Fobian Mountains, we headed for Daloss, the city of mystery. Behind us lay Martians and martial rule. Ahead lay rescue for our comrades, and adventure and perhaps death for us! What a step it was! We had outlawed ourselves. We were fugitives, subject to the wrath of a whole planet.

"Isn't it great?" screamed Little Cedric, wonder and awe shining in his young eyes, as we pounded along on our grey desert mounts.

"Great?" mocked the deep voice of Ivan Zenoff. "Wait until you see the wild Mauros before you say that. They fight like hell, and torture like the demons of their own black saint, Erlik. Say, buddy, you haven't seen or heard

anything yet!"

"Wait until *you* see the Mauro girls!" Cedric shot back at him.

Several miles onward, above the pungent stench of slith-sweat, drifted the thin English voice of the man whom we called the Duke.

"By Jove, they say the Mauro women are devils, too! They sneak out on the field of battle at night and sink knives into the wounded enemy, the bally things! No man comes back from this part of the world, what!"

Southward over the red dunes we swept, and up them again almost to the hurtling desert moon, yelling, singing, fair-warning the enemy. Fighting fever ran high. Singing rose louder. Our men shouted defiance at the moon, and shook their fists at the desert sky. Who cared if the Mauros heard? Who cared if anyone heard? Ahead of us lay a mission of rescue and adventure.

Hours later, small squat bushes and sparse blue-knobbed grey lichenous trees loomed before us, as the country became more hilly. We passed a black ersite shrine, solemn in its lonely glory. The hooves of our sliths clicked sharply on the bones of animals and of humans, left to scorch in the desert sun. Other battles had been fought here, grim to the very end. Life had pulsed at this spot long ago; caravans had come from the canal cities in long lines of swaying sliths, carrying plunder and Mauros, frowning Mauros with wide hats and colored capes.

"Something's going to happen!" yelled Little Cedric, his eyes glowing. "I can feel it!"

"We ought to meet them soon," I answered. "We've been riding for hours, advertising our whereabouts to all the planet. Where *are* the enemy?"

On thundered the three thousand, past lonely, rocky slag-bluffs, past saltbeds weirdly white beneath the desert

moon. Looming steadily nearer ahead of us, rose the mighty Fobian range. The second moon rose in the West, and hurtled across the sky, in reverse direction to its more sluggish brother.

Then suddenly from a grove of thick lichens on a rocky slope, spurts of livid flame streaked the night, as atomic rifles sizzled. Sliths shrieked and stumbled in our ranks, men fell, gasps and cries rent the air. The Legion of Death slowed down as though a huge wave had rolled against it. Again many shots sizzled forth, pouring death into our ranks. We were ambushed!

WAVING his saber, Captain Hammersmith shouted to us to follow him. Straight into that grove of fragrant blue-knobbed lichens he dashed. And we three thousand followed close behind. Sabers slashed down into the bushes; atomic pistols spurted sharply; atomic rifles sizzled sudden death. Cries rang out. More rifle shots sounded. Men and sliths tumbled into the bushes.

White-clothed Mauros appeared from everywhere, like ghosts in the moonlight. They poured from every bush, firing at close range.

A sharp cry of pain beside me, a youthful cry! It was Little Cedric. There was an agonized expression on his boyish face as he slid heavily from the saddle of his plunging slith, to be trampled and crushed by the splay feet of the sliths behind.

Poor Little Cedric! Never would he meet again his beautiful golden-haired Mauro maiden, whom he had come so far and lived through so much hell to see.

But we had no time to worry about Little Cedric or any other of our lost comrades, for we had a fight on our hands. And fight we did! Many a swarthy Mauro rose from behind a

blue-knobbed lichen, and toppled, never to rise again. Many were crushed under the thundering sliths of the Legion. But there were countless others to take the places of those who fell. From the hill beyond they poured in never ending numbers, white capes flowing in the breeze.

Cries from the mouth of a gorge ahead rose above the din of battle. Shots rang out, and a moving wave of men and sliths streamed forth, looming wild and fierce against the night's eerie horizon.

"Daloss must be close at hand!" shouted Hammersmith, his face streaked with blood, and his red hair disheveled. "These are the devils who massacre women and children, and who would burn our comrades at the altar of Erlik. Charge, men! Charge!"

The enemy cavalry met us with a fierceness that stunned us, that stopped us momentarily. Some were old bearded Mauros with flowing white capes wrapped around them, fighting with a recklessness like that of youth, their short broad-bladed lances darting back and forth with flying speed. Some, equipped with atomic rifles, fired like mad as they came forward. Some were young Mauros, haughty and disdainful, their white teeth flashing in snarls of rage, their practiced arms wielding spears with quick thrusts of death. And among them were many men with skins as white as our own—strange phenomenon of a strange planet!

Cries of the wounded rose on all sides. It was close in-fighting now, every man for himself. You could hear the sharp gasp of breath as blades sank into soft flesh. Then the agonized moan as the sabers or lances were pulled out, the heart blood leaping thickly on the slayer's arm. A wracking cough—some Mauro or Earthman choking on his own life's blood.

It was fight and slash, and slash and fight. At close quarters, rifles—even atomic pistols—were ineffective. The whole air seemed filled with stabbing spears and sweeping sabers, streaked red in the moonlight.

Suddenly a hoarse, victorious shout went up, rose loudly on the soft desert wind. The fighting mass began to shift toward the mountains. The Legion of Death was moving on!

MAD glorious joy surged in our hearts, and swelled in our throats. The enemy, battling desperately, retreated slowly at first, and then broke into a rout, the Legion following close behind.

At the entrance to the pass—a gash in the mighty Fobian range—we were met by a volley of shots. Here again were wild Martian natives hidden behind every rock and shrub. Determined hundreds, armed with atomic rifles, standing in the narrow defile, blocking our way.

Twice we swept against that line of white-caped Mauros, to be thrown fiercely back. But on the third charge we broke through into the rocky canyon. Clatter of hooves against the stony bottom, as we charged on; clank of scabbards echoing up the dark walls. Then we poured out into a broad valley, diminished in number, but still compact enough for battle array.

Ahead in the moonlight rose the majestic spires and minarets of a city, beautiful in its lonely glory. Jagged mountain ranges flanked it, while beyond it stretched a high plateau, red and barren and forlorn.

"Daloss!" shouted Hammersmith, digging his spurs deep into his slith. "God grant that we are in time to save our comrades!"

To a man, the two thousand who were left in the Legion of Death gave

rein to their sliths and raced toward the high red mud wall that circled the city. But the gleaming metal gate of fretwork design in the arched doorway, was closed. From the walls, hidden riflemen opened a sizzling death-dealing fire, shouting to Erlik to save their holy of holies.

Then Hammersmith, our leader, commanded our trumpeter to sound retreat. At the first notes of that well-known but little-used bugle-call, a snarl of incredulous rage arose from the parched throats of the Legion of Death.

Shouts of protest filled the air.

"What th' hell! Come all this way for nothing? Are yez yeller, Hammy? Have youse fergot yer own brother?"

But our Captain rose in his stirrups, held up one hand commanding silence, and cried,

"It's only to rest a moment, and take stock of losses, and form again for the final assault. Come on! To that lichen-grove over there!"

To a little lichen-grove, on a hill overlooking the city, he led us. There we found a spring and a small brook,* where we drank, and watered our winded steeds—but scantily, only scantily—and washed off our dust and clotted gore.

Scarcely two thousand of us remained, out of our original three thousand. Hammersmith left seven hundred in the grove as a reserve and a rear guard, to cover our return—if we ever should return. In command of them he placed a bull-necked bullet-headed Hungarian named Kuswa.

WITH thirteen hundred refreshed and determined men, as the sky began to turn pink above the mountain tops to the eastward, he moved once

* Apparently the land of the Mauros is watered by seepage from some of the quite distant canals, as no canal runs anywhere near it.—Ed.

more toward the city gates. On the way we found two water-soaked argan logs in the winding creek. With them we battered at the gate. Back and forth those battering-rams beat upon the metal doors, shaking them with every blow.

The reorganized Mauro cavalry attacked our rear; but so fiercely did our rear-guard ward them off, that the work at the gates was not interrupted. For some reason, the firing from atop the wall and from within the gates was not heavy.

At last the grilled gates crashed open. We pushed, we surged through, with wild cries. Down the wide central street of the city we rode at terrific pace, toward the great rounded dome of the Temple of Erlik, which loomed ahead.

Low red-walled buildings flanked the street on both sides. Mosaics, blue and white and turquoise green, were visible in the pale light of early dawn. In the doorways, veiled women gave us hasty frightened glances, then scampered inside. A nearby grove of some unknown flowering tree poured its fragrance on the breeze. From a house on a narrow side street, a baby wailed, and its cry was quickly muffled.

Could a man ever forget that ride? Soft winds blowing on tired cheeks, worn bodies, steaming sliths. And behind the latticed windows which lined the streets, frightened faces staring out at us: children's faces; women's faces. Shutters quickly slammed shut.

On toward the looming black-domed temple we rode. High stone walls, with windowed stone towers atop them, stretched far to the east and west. Beyond this wall waved the velvety tops of many blood-green ktath-trees indicating vast, cool gardens. And deep in the center stood the immense black-plastered temple itself, with its seven rainbow-hued spires, and its vast black

dome reaching into the Martian sky.

The sight stirred our blood. Within those walls, within that temple, were our comrades, perhaps even now being roasted to death on the sacrificial altar of gold! With a growl of rage we spurred our sliths on again, firing spurts of atomic flame back at the charging Mauros behind us, firing sidewise at the snipers who lay flat on the roofs of nearby houses.

A sudden sharp twinge in my right shoulder twisted me in my saddle; then, a moment later, burning pain. I felt myself slipping from my saddle, and grabbed madly for the pommel, missing it. The ground struck my head a stunning blow. Thundering, thudding splay hooves sped by me, over me. Then a silent darkness swept down upon me, and I knew no more.

LATER, through moments filled with wild dreams, came the sound of women's voices in the universal tongue of Mars. My years in the Legion had given me enough knowledge of the language so that I could understand what they were saying. A strident voice was scolding, commanding,

"You are a little fool, Esta! Do as I tell you!"

A low sweet voice replied in pleading tones,

"But mother mine, I cannot kill them. Even to think of it makes my heart chill!"

"What! You will not slay these foreign crraats, these beasts from another world, who have killed our own men, these infidels who desecrate the holy city of the Black Star?"

"N-no! Nol The thought of it makes my hand shrink to my body."

"Fie, child. Is the betrothed of the handsome Ab-Nadik a coward?"

"I care not what Ab-Nadik thinks! I—oh, mother, *what* are you doing?"

"See, it is like this, my child. Open his shirt, pull back his head by the hair, and let the point of the knife tickle, before you sink it deep into the Earthman's throat. Ah! In Erlik's name! Hear his cursed blood gurgle!"

"Mother, mother! It is terrible!"

"Nonsense, child. Every Mauro woman must do her duty. Away with your soft-hearted foolishness— See over there! An Earthman stirs into consciousness. Slit his throat, my child, and praise Erlik."

It was all a horrible nightmare to my slowly awakening consciousness. Cautiously I opened my eyes, and stared about me.

I was lying on the paving-stones of a broad street lined with red clay houses. Far down this street in one direction was the grillwork of the city gate, now closed and guarded by swarthy men in wide hats and flowing white capes. Down the street in the other direction rose the rainbow spires and the black dome of the Temple of Erlik, with a surging thousand or so of Legionnaires massed in front of it. Around me on the pavement lay many dead and dying men, some clad in flowing white, and some in the red uniform of the Foreign Legion of Mars. And a few disemboveled sliths.

But what caught and held my eyes was the girl whose voice I had heard. Curls of burnished gold. Skin, shell-pink. Eyes of sapphire blue. And a slim but voluptuous figure, half concealed, half revealed by her flowing white shawl and diaphanous garments beneath. My heart beat wildly at such sheer beauty.

And standing with her, a hawk-faced crone—a white woman too, but gnarled and old and fiendish.

They moved away from me toward the side of the street, the mother leading; and almost I raised myself and

called to them to return, so smitten was I at the sight of the blonde young Mauro girl.

Louder voices, closer, shriller. More native women slinking through the streets, like gaudy vultures, tearing at men's throats and hearts. Then the wail of the hawk-faced crone near the wall of a building.

"Great Erlik! It is my son, your brother Ben-Stu, who lies here! He is badly wounded!"

The younger woman ran toward the wall, but the mother pushed her away. She put her scrawny old arms around the body of the young wounded Mauro, and weeping, hugged him to her breast.

"I will take him home," she cried with fierce mother love. "But you, Esta, be about your work. The cursed Earthmen have almost killed your brother!"

"Yes!" the young girl exclaimed, her beautiful face now bitterly contorted. "Give me the knife, mother. I can kill them *now!*"

SHE strode directly toward me, a long kris in her hand, and her glinting yellow curls stirring in the wind. As she neared me, she stumbled and fell, but even as she fell she made a lunge at me, the knife sinking between the stones of the street within inches of my side.

In another moment she had righted herself. Her slender hand ripped open my shirt. I tried to roll over, but was too weak. I groaned. Her hand took hold of my hair and jerked my head back cruelly. Her pink cheeks were flushed, and there was a wild light of fanaticism in her heaven-blue eyes.

My fingers reached up and fastened about her wrist, to stay that knife which was ready to plunge into my breast. I rose on my elbow, my grip still on her arm.

"I want to live a little longer," I said slowly. "And that knife is very sharp—*Esta*."

Her tense and panting body was close to mine. Fiercely she struggled to get the knife free, to plunge it into my heart. Then our glances met and held. I gazed deep into the blue pools of her eyes, and smiled—smiled happily, confidently, though I was close to death. Her gaze fell. Thick long lashes masked her eyes. Her face went white—then flushed again.

I took the knife from her nerveless fingers, and flung it to clatter against the wall of a nearby house.

"You are too beautiful to be a killer!" I said as I released her. Unthinking, I had spoken in English.

And she replied in the same tongue, but with a strange lilting cadence, which gave to the language a beauty that it had never had for me before.

"No," she said levelly, although her lips trembled slightly, "I cannot kill you. Yet why did you and your comrades come, bringing death to our peaceful city, if you expect not death in return?"

"Beautiful one," I replied, "I know now that I came here for *you*! Tell me that you believe it!"

My words were as unexpected to me as they were to her. Her blue eyes widened for one startled moment. Then she smiled shyly, frightenedly, wonderingly. I slipped one arm around her slim waist, but she pushed me slowly away and stared at me, as if searching, seeking for something. A subtle joy vibrated through my war-tired body. This lovely girl and I—there was a bond between us, growing stronger every moment. We two were alone together, in spite of the dead all around us, and the stalking vulture-women. Words were unnecessary, words were not swift enough to convey the flood of

thoughts and feelings that swept through us.

For a long time we sat in silence. Finally she spoke.

"You must be an American, for the English are not like this."

"What do you know of Englishmen or of Americans, or of any of the races of my Earth?" I asked. "And how does it come that you speak my language?"

"Ah," she laughed. "I went to school in England on your Earth for two Earth years. I am the daughter of the rich Mu-Lai."

I STIFFENED. Mu-Lai! Slaughterer of defenseless women and children. Scourge of the trackless deserts of Mars. The fiend who was about to offer up my ten comrades on the altar of gold! It was to rescue these comrades that I had waded through blood to this holy city. I had come here to fight against fiends—not for a love tryst with an angel.

Sternly I thrust the girl from me and staggered to my feet.

"*Esta*," I harshly declared. "I came here for rescue and revenge. When that is over I shall return to you."

"Oh, do not go," she cried in alarm. "You will be killed. You cannot hope to prevail against the forces of my father, and against the curses of Erlik, our god."

"I can try."

"I will not let you go to your death. Erlik has sent you here not to rescue your comrades but to rescue me. Against my will my father betrothed me to one Ab-Nadik, whom I do not love. You can—but no, no! What am I saying? I must keep my promise. Still I want you to live. I can hide you. Perhaps you can escape from Daloss under cover of night, when the two moons have set."

I shook my head, though the temptation to be with her was strong. I had work to do—man's work.

"I go to rescue my comrades," I cried. "But wait here for me, Esta. I'll come back."

"If you must go, you must," she sighed wearily. "I shall wait. I shall watch, and hope."

Drawing my saber, I strode toward the towering black dome of the Temple of Erlik, scattering the gaudy-caped white-clad vulture women, who hovered about the dead and dying in the street.

"You carrion!" I shouted at them in Martian. "Leave them be! Begone, or may Erlik curse you!"

They scurried for cover, like the ghouls that they were. In a side street I spied a wild-eyed slith, stirrups swinging as it sniffed irresolute. Quietly I approached the animal. It permitted me to touch its velvet hide, to pat the smooth flow of its neck.

Painfully I raised myself into the saddle, though my wounded side burned. The quivering animal quieted as I took the reins and swung it about. Together, we clattered down the street toward the temple, where sounds of fighting rose loud upon the morning air. Rising in my stirrups and turning, I stared behind me for a moment. Standing where I had left her was Esta, her hands clasped to her heart. My blood pulsed wildly. She was mine—mine! No Ab-Nadik, nor any other blue or red Martian—or even a white Martian, for that matter—would ever take her away from me.

Then I faced toward the battle ahead, and gave my slith the spurs.

The whine of atomic impulses sped past my ears, and sang on into the morning, as I rode. The wide metal gates of the temple grounds were open. The Legion had already forced their way in. Two old Mauros in dirty capes,

lashed out at my slith's legs with their short broad-bladed lances, as we thundered on past them into the temple gardens.

At the entrance to the temple itself I saw large numbers of the Legion, fighting with Mauros. Many of our men were now on foot, their sliths slain.

IN front of the main doorway of the temple stood a giant one-eyed blue Martian, with a mighty broad-sword in each hand. On each side of him stood others of the enemy, clad in flowing capes, javelins darting as they tried to halt the rush of our Legion. Still others, hidden behind the ktath-trees, were pouring devastating spurts of atomic fire upon our men.

But the Legion did not stop. The unconquerable urge to rescue our comrades drove us on.

Never have I seen such a splendid physical specimen as that one-eyed blue giant, standing there guarding the temple gates. Naked to the waist, he stood, with a four-foot blade circling in each hamlike hand. His knotted shoulders were at least a yard across, and above them rose a neck corded like that of a bull. The muscles of his chest and arms rippled and rolled beneath his sleek blue hide, as he swung and lunged.

As I edged through the jostling throng, I saw our Legion surge against him three times like waves against a rock, and three times fall back in thwarted spray.

Then Hammersmith alone on slith-back charged the doorway of the temple. The huge Martian giant braced his feet, and gripped his two swords to resist this onslaught. But, just before our captain came within range of a cutting slash, he jerked his reins taut, and his charger reared up, to strike at the blue giant with its front slay feet.

The Martian gave backward not an inch. Dropping one of his swords, he seized the nearest foreleg of the slith with one mighty hand, and held the beast aloft with effortless ease, as he lunged at its heart with his remaining weapon.

With a gurgling cough, the slith collapsed. For an instant the blue giant held it up, then cast it from him with a gesture of disdain, and stooped to retrieve his second sword.

As the slith fell, Hammersmith slid from its back, and rushed the giant. Swinging his saber with both hands, he brought it down on the Martian's head with a blow that would have cleft the skull of an ox.

It never even fazed the blue man. Jerking suddenly erect, as though merely annoyed by a scratch, he swung one of his own blades at Hammersmith. But the Australian was in too close to be cut, and the weapon merely felled him with a glancing blow on the side of the head.

He dropped to the temple steps, and his adversary placed one huge bare foot on his shoulders, lowered one broadsword to get the aim, and then swung it aloft.

I charged. On my saber I caught the descending blow, and turned it aside. The very fury of my foolhardy onslaught forced the giant back up the steps. He stumbled on the step behind him; and, by that time, I had recovered from my parry and swung at him with a low crossbody swipe.

Through the knotted muscles of his belly slashed my blade. But the blue man, though mortally wounded, was a powerful menace still. With a bestial roar of rage, he raised both his weapons aloft, and brought them convergingly down at my shoulders. The blood from his slit belly gushed out over my riding-boots. I slipped and fell. The

swords clashed together above me. Then the body of the Martian giant lurched on top of me, crushing me down to the foot of the temple steps.

SOMEONE pulled the carcass off, and I staggered to my feet and stared around. Captain Hammersmith stood beside me, his desert headgear gone, his red hair disheveled, rubbing a bump on the side of his head. The remaining Mauros had been brushed aside, now that the huge one-eyed blue Martian was no more; and the Legion of Death was surging past us up the steps.

Then Mauro reinforcements mounted on slith-back thundered into the gardens behind us, yelling wildly, their javelins flashing in the morning sunlight which now bathed the planet with pink-tinted glory.

But even this attack from the rear could not stay us. In fact, it drove us on. On we charged, fighting madly, till we streamed through the main entrance into the temple itself.

Into the high-ceilinged inner room of the Temple of Erlik we swept. All its defenders had fallen. We halted, panting for breath, and stared about us at the beautiful iridescence of the holy place. Intricate geometric weavings of pale blue, rose, and green greeted us on every side. At the south end of the vast structure, high in the glossy black vault, the sun—streaming in through many small windows in the dome—played upon a riot of colors. A million golden filaments sparkled, filling the air with a luminous haze that blended now to pale rose, now to delicate mother of pearl.

High above us, from the depths of a barred gallery, a loud unruffled voice chanted with Martian fatalism:

"Erlik! Erlik, the Dark Star! Erlik, the Unseen God!"

Then there burst upon us more

spouts of atomic energy from unseen places. Mauro riflemen, hidden throughout the temple, determined to glorify Erlik by killing the Earthman crraats who had dared to set foot therein.

We scattered to seek shelter behind the great round pillars in the labyrinth of intricate doorways and passages which angled from the spacious open center of the temple. Loud sizzling detonations echoed through the sacred place. Acrid smoke rose in grey clouds to mingle with the haze of color in the black dome of the god Erlik.

At the main doorway a small detachment of the Legion of Death were holding back the Mauro slith-mounted cavalry who had attacked our rear.

The radiance of the rising sun, constantly lighting more and more of the great dome, fell full upon a huge shining altar, filling the whole temple with bright rays of glinting gold. The altar gleamed as though it were the sun itself. It was the great golden altar of Erlik, famed throughout all of Mars.

But it was not the sight of this fabulous fortune in gold that sent us charging forward over the vast tile floor, disdainful of the atomic blasts that dropped our men like wilted insects.

No, it was the sight of the ten bodies which lay naked upon that golden altar: bodies with white skin, the bodies of our comrades captured two days ago by the Mauros.

AMONG them, I recognized the fat roly-poly face of my friend Victor Lafontaine. And the slim keen features of the brother of our Captain.

Golden straps clasped their ankles, their waists, their arms, their shoulders. And all were gagged with cloth of gold. Beyond the altar we could see leaping red tongues of flame licking at the thick dry faggots of lichen-wood piled there.

The bound men lying on top of the altar tried in vain to squirm, to roll away from that blistering heat. Their bodies were wet with perspiration; their eyes mirrored intense pain; and their fingers clenched and re clenched in agony.

Furiously Hammersmith raced in front of us, his red hair awry, his blue-grey eyes flashing.

"Look what the heathen devils have done to our comrades!" he shouted. "We must save them, even if it costs our own lives. I come, my brother! I come!"

As we rushed forward, two gold-encrusted doors, leading to a small chapel to the left opened. Fierce, bearded Mauros debouched, atomic rifles in their swarthy hands. The leader, a tall hawk-nosed white-skinned man with thin lips, held up his left hand.

"Halt, you Earthmen!" he shouted. "Or all of you will be shot down where you stand. I, Mu-Lai, command you in the name of Erlik! Touch not the sacred altar of the Dark Star, lest your bodies and souls be bled with a thousand tortures!"

Only for an instant did that command stay us; then once more we surged forward in an angry wave.

"Ab-Nadik," cried Mu-Lai to a dark slim handsome young Martian with black flashing eyes standing by his side, "not an Earthman crraat must live."

Red stabs of flame jetted from our guns in reply. Mu-Lai and Ab-Nadik, the betrothed of my Esta, dodged nimbly behind the golden altar, and blasted back at us from that shelter.

Around us scores of our comrades fell, but still we charged on. So fierce was our onslaught that the Mauros were forced to retreat into their chapel, even their great chief himself, and his handsome young lieutenant, Ab-Nadik. But, in spite of this retreat, snipers con-

tinued to pour atomic death upon us from all sides.

Still we came forward, scant scores of us, who had been hundreds before. With splintering swords we pried off the golden bands that bound our comrades on the altar. Weeping, sobbing, they gasped their gratitude. Captain Hammersmith clasped his brother in his arms for one brief moment. Then more blasts of force winged about us. Fast we retreated to the shelter of the columned passages, and from there we returned the fire of the Mauros.

But the enemy had reorganized, and now poured into the temple at all sides from many concealed entrances. The place swarmed with them. Swords and javelins flashed, atomic pistols barked, atomic rifles sizzled. We Earthmen had profaned the golden altar of Erlik. We must not be permitted to escape!

BACKING from pillar to pillar, the handful of us who were left, made our way slowly and painfully toward the main exit of the temple. But that way of escape we now found blocked by solid ranks of the enemy.

A black passage loomed to one side, and we slid into it, only about a hundred of us now, out of the fourteen hundred who had stormed the place, and the ten men whom we had rescued. Behind us, in the mazes of the temple, our wounded were putting up a fight as long as there was any life left in them. And we knew that they would never permit themselves or each other to fall alive into the hands of the Erlik-worshippers.

Along the sides of the corridor we found some movable stone benches, and with these we threw up a barricade at the entrance. Then our red-headed Captain called to me and Keating:

"Warren and Duke, come here. I want the two of you to take a dozen

men and go down this passage to its other end. Duke, you guard the exit, and send back one man to report to me. Warren, if you can get out, take four or five fellows with you, fight your way to the lichen grove, and send in the reserves. We've given these Martian heathens so much hell, that with seven hundred reinforcements, we can cut our way to safety. Get going."

The Duke and I warmly shook our leader's hand, selected our squad of men, and felt our way down the dark corridor.

It turned and twisted, then gradually got lighter. Finally as we rounded a turn, we sighted a crouched figure in a white cape, sneaking toward us. Up came Keating's atomic rifle; but, as he pressed its button, I knocked the weapon aside. Just in time, too, for the skulking figure was that of Esta.

"Oh, my beloved!" she cried in English, flinging herself into my arms.

"What ho! Eh, what?" the Duke exclaimed, edging forward. "I say, Warren, I didn't know that you had friends in this blarsted heathen city. Introduce us, will you?" But his words, light as they sounded, had no humor in them. They were as cutting as cold steel.

"This is Miss Esta," I stammered, "the daughter of Mu-Lai."

"So!" came with a hiss from my squad. The Mauro chieftain had spared no women in his raid on Wacco. The Martian women had slit the throats of our wounded in today's battle. Then what hope for mercy could a woman of the household of Mu-Lai have, from even a British gentleman?

Up came a menacing row of atomic rifles. But I thrust Esta behind me, and drew my saber, and faced them. Knowing that it would do no good to appeal to their chivalry toward a woman of a race which had shown no

chivalry to us, I appealed to their common sense.

"Don't be fools!" I cried. "Esta was educated in England. She has no stomach for this heathen slaughter. She has come to help us. Tell them so, Esta."

"Yes, oh, my beloved. What is it that you wish? Only command me, and Esta will obey."

A snort of contempt came from my men, but I cried triumphantly,

"There! What did I tell you!" Then to the girl I said, "Can you lead me safely out of this city?"

"Yes, beloved," was her reply.

"It looks fishy to me," the Duke gritted, his aristocratic eyes flashing cold. "Well, Warren, run along with your girl friend; but Heaven help you, if you double-cross us. And I'm sending four men to trail you."

"Some day you'll apologize to the lady for this. She's saving your worthless hide," I shouted, contemptuously. Then I turned and followed Esta.

The last that I heard behind me, as I rounded the next corner, was one of the squad anxiously asking,

"'Adn't I better pot the blarsted blighter?"

And Keating's disdainful reply,

"Don't bother. If she takes him home with her, he'll end up on the golden altar of Erlik. So what's the bally difference?"

OUT through a door in the side of the temple, hidden by lichen-trees, she led me. This door opened upon a quiet peaceful sunlit court. Tied to a ring in the wall was a stately white slith, saddled and bridled.

"My brothers," she said simply. And, at the memory which those words kindled in her, her blue eyes flashed fire for a moment. God, but she was beautiful in her anger!

Then her face cleared, and she smiled

up at me. I clasped her in my arms, and covered her face with kisses. For several minutes, she pressed close against me; then drew bashfully away. Suddenly she whipped off her white cape, and stood revealed to me in her blouse and pantaloons. Never had I seen such beauty! Her perfect features were lit with the light of service.

"Take this cape," she softly murmured. "With it wrapped around you, and riding my brother's slith, you can make a dash for safety."

"Safety?" I cried, though my heart was in my eyes, which were devouring Esta, rather than in my words. "Safety? Never! I shall bring back reinforcements, and we shall win!"

Alarmed, she clutched my arm, and her touch thrilled me.

"No, no!" she cried. "They will kill you all. Already your men are almost overpowered. Soon they will capture all of you, kill some, and throw the others into the dungeons. Then on each holy day many of you will be sacrificed to Erlik on the golden altar. Go, before it is too late, beloved."

"Never!" I cried. "I shall return to die here with the rest, if that be our fate. But I am grateful to you. I—I love you." My gaze burned into hers.

She hid her head. I thought I heard a sob. Then she straightened, and looked me squarely in the eye.

"My beloved is brave, as becomes the chosen of the daughter of Mu-Lai," said she. "Go, then, and bring back help to your comrades if you can. And may Erlik go with you. Esta will be waiting for you."

Once more I held her girlish form close to me. Then, as the hidden door in the side of the temple opened to disgorge the four Legionnaires whom the Duke had sent to follow me, I released my darling, untied the white slith, wrapped the cape about me, vaulted

into the saddle, and clattered off out of the little courtyard.

As I turned the corner at the end of the alley, I twisted about in the saddle, and glanced back. The golden-haired Martian maiden stood waving one dainty hand at me. On each side of her stood two Legionnaires with jaws dropped open in stupefied surprise.

A strange exaltation thrilled through me. I felt that I could ride down any number of heathens. I filled my lungs with glorious thin morning Martian air, and drove my spurs into the sides of my splendid white mount.

SOON I had found the main thoroughfare of the city, and was winging down it, away from the temple, and toward the big fretwork gates of the main entrance. They stood slightly ajar, for we had smashed their locks and bars with our argan logs earlier that morning. To one side squatted two white-clad Mauros, their long atomic rifles leaning against the parapet.

"Ho, Ben-Stu," one of them shouted, recognizing the white slith as belonging to Esta's brother.

"It is not he!" cried the other, leaping up and reaching for his rifle.

I snatched out my atomic pistol, and sent a blast of pure force through his head. Then reining my mount, I shot down the other. Two dead Mauros. Two less enemies to meet our depleted forces.

Dismounting, I propped the two bodies up against the wall, so that they would look like the sleepy watchmen they had been but a moment before. Then vaulting once more into the saddle, I sped out of the city to the lichen grove on the hill:

Here I found the bullet-headed Hun-garian, Kuswa, and his seven hundred men, fretting with inaction, and chaf-

ing over the delay. Briefly I sketched the situation. Then, with Kuswa and me at their head, the reinforcements filed quietly out of the grove and down to the city gates. No one showed up to oppose us. The two dead Mauros sat still as though dozing on guard, as we entered the city.

No time for concealment now! With a cheer, we charged down the central street toward the black-domed Temple of Erlik at the other end. The Martian cavalry heard us, and formed and met us just short of the temple. At their head rode Mu-Lai himself, slim, hawk-nosed, white-skinned, with thin sneering lips. I spurred to meet him.

But, as the two forces crashed together, I was swept slightly to one side, so that it was Kuswa, not I, who took on this chieftain of the enemy.

I sent atomic blasts from my pistol at Mauro after Mauro, until its force-chamber was exhausted; then drew my saber and laced out at the fiendish wide-hatted faces all around me. Two javelins lanced at my neck, and I could guard against only one.

My slith foundered, pulling me down with him. I ducked, and the blades flashed harmlessly above me. Then I was up and out of the saddle, fighting on foot, slashing the bellies of sliths, cutting at legs of Mauros, dodging the thrust of javelins.

It was not long before most of the combatants on both sides were off their sliths, struggling on the rubbed pavement. And gradually the tide of battle worked its way up to the wall of the temple, and through the garden gates, and to the temple steps beyond.

Down the steps to join us came our red-haired Captain and his mere handful of survivors.

SUDDENLY I found myself facing Mu-Lai in the press. We crossed

blades, his javelin and my sword, and the Mauros and Legionnaires gave way to let us fight.

At first we fenced cautiously, until finally the Martian chieftain forced me back a pace, and drew back his javelin to spear me through. Putting both hands to my saber, I swung it around my head with such force that it swept his spear from his grasp. Caught off his balance, he crashed to his knees before me. He was at my mercy. I drew back my blade to pierce the heart of this slayer of women and children, this torturer of Christian men.

But the memory of a blue-eyed gold-framed face stayed me. I lowered my point.

"Rise, father of Esta," I mumbled in Martian. "I cannot kill you."

Mu-Lai glanced up at me, with surprise and perhaps gratitude in his cruel eyes. Then something struck my head from behind, and I pitched forward into black unconsciousness.

MY return to my senses was equally black, the blackness of night. Not a star flickered above. I lay on damp stones; and around me was a musty, foetid smell.

I sat up. I stood. I groped about. Stone walls on three sides of me, hemming me in. And on the fourth side iron bars. A prison cell!

I stumbled over something soft and yielding. A human body. It groaned. Kneeling, I felt of it. It wore a military uniform, the uniform of an officer of the Legion.

"Hammersmith!" I cried. "My Captain!"

"That—you—Warren?" he thickly replied.

"Yes. What happened?"

He sat up, and clasped my hand in the black darkness.

"They got us. All of us," he said.

"I was the last to go down. Well, I guess we shall grace the golden altar of Erlik together, you and I. But it was a glorious fight while it lasted. There *were* three thousand of us. Now there are just you and I."

"We can kill ourselves—or each other," I suggested, feeling for my weapons. But they had been taken from me.

A flickering light appeared in the distance. I could now see a dimly lit corridor, stone walled, stretching away from the barred door of our cell, and two white-swathed figures coming toward us, one of whom was carrying a torch.

It was my Esta! And her father, Mu-Lai, the Mauro chief!

My darling looked sweet and worried and wholly desirable. And, strange to relate, the bloodthirsty old Martian did not seem at all fierce or wicked at the moment. Perhaps it was due to some strange effect of the flickering torchlight. But, as I stood there, clutching the bars of my cell, he looked to be a courteous kindly gentleman of my own Earth.

And why not! We of the Legion of Death were regular fellows when off duty—no better, no worse, than the average run of mankind. Yet to our Martian enemies, in the heat of battle, we doubtless seemed like fiends from the hell of their dark god. And so, by the same token, the Mauros were probably quite charming in the bosom of their own homes.

These thoughts flashed through my mind, as I stood there staring out through the bars at Esta and her hawk-faced father.

Mu-Lai advanced and held out his hand.

"My dear Sir," he said in perfect English. "You are a brave fighter, and a worthy foeman. Erlik loves such as

you. And so, I am informed, does my daughter." He smiled at his little joke. "Furthermore, you spared my life in the battle. So I am prepared to offer you your freedom—if you will embrace the faith of the Dark Star, and will join the desert tribe of Mu-Lai."

I glanced from his aquiline face to the pleading eyes of the girl. Why not? It seemed my only chance for life; and perhaps, if I accepted, Esta might—Perhaps the unloved Ab-Nadik had perished in the battle.

And then I thought of Bill Hammer-smith, lying behind me, wounded, in the cell.

"The Chief is very kind," I replied, "and the Chief's offer is most magnanimous. Set my Captain free likewise, and I will gladly accept."

"The *other* Earthman *crraat* must die on the golden altar of Erlik," he snapped.

"Even if he embraces the Dark Star faith like me?" I asked.

"I wouldn't trust the infidel."

"Sir," I said, "neither the Captain nor I can ever return to the Martian Foreign Legion. We would be shot for treason. So it will be safe for you to trust us."

Esta cut in with, "Oh, my be— Oh, Sir." She was speaking English, like her father and me. "You cannot save *him*, but you *can* save yourself. What is the use to throw away two lives, when one can be saved? And I *want* you saved."

"I'm sorry, dear!" I replied with sad dignity. Then, turning to her implacable father, "Captain Hammersmith and I stand together, Sir!"

FOOTSTEPS sounded in the darkness, and the rattling of a scabbard. A tall dark handsome young Mauro came forward out of the gloom. It was Ab-Nadik!

Esta's face whitened. Fear leaped into her beautiful eyes.

"Ah, father of my betrothed," said Ab-Nadik in Martian, casting a respectful glance at Mu-Lai. "I see that you are preparing to pass sentence on the last two of the Earthman *crraats*. But what are *you* doing in this foul place, sweet Esta?"

Mu-Lai's eyes flashed a warning at his daughter.

"She came with me, to see the infidels who have killed so many of our men. She is a fearless girl, Ab-Nadik—a worthy bride for you."

Ab-Nadik showed two rows of white teeth in a self-satisfied grin.

"Yes, my chief, she is pure and steadfast. Now that the enemy have been repulsed, Sir, perhaps we can plan for an early wedding."

"There will be no wedding!" Esta spoke clearly, calmly, though her face was pale. She reached through the bars and took my rough hand in her smooth soft one. "*This* is the man I love!"

My heart pounded at her words. Yet it all seemed so hopeless now.

Mu-Lai's face clouded with anger. Ab-Nadik stared at Esta, unbelieving; then rage and hate welled into his dark molten eyes. A sneer overspread his handsome face. He whirled savagely toward Mu-Lai.

"She, the daughter of a chief, marry an unbeliever?" he gasped. "She must be mad!"

Mu-Lai jerked his daughter away from me with one sinewy hand.

"Ab-Nadik," he gritted, "I did not tell you of this, for I thought the girl had but a passing fancy for this man from another world. Then, too, he had saved my life. But he slew our men, so many of them that my heart is now hardened against him. Esta shall be yours."

"No! No!" cried my beloved. "I shall kill myself first."

Ab-Nadik grinned with malice, his burning eyes filling with hate as he glowered at me.

"Then," said he to Mu-Lai, his voice like the hiss of a desert serpent, "the crraat shall die?"

Mu-Lai nodded.

"Yes, he shall die. *Both* of the Earthman crraats shall die!"

"On the golden altar of Erlik."

Once again Mu-Lai nodded, his eyes black slits of fanatic hate.

Esta, in a frenzy, flung herself upon Ab-Nadik and pounded his chest with small clenched hands.

"Oh, I hate you," she cried brokenly.

"I love him, I tell you. I love only him."

Ab-Nadik laughed harshly and drew her within his arms.

"But you shall learn to love *me*, light of my heart," he exulted, "after *he* is dead!"

The young Martian tried to kiss Esta, but she twisted her face aside.

"Come, Ab-Nadik, let us go!" Mu-Lai said sternly. "Esta, I command you!"

THEN they dragged Esta away, kicking and squirming. With tense fingers I stood gripping those bars. Oh, that I were free to fight for her, to carry her with me, far from this heathen city of a strange planet.

Ab-Nadik turned, and cast a triumphant leering glance back at me. Helpless, raging, I shook my fist at him. How I longed to get my fingers around his throat. My Esta! Would I ever see her again?

Hammersmith patted my shoulder.

"The fortunes of war, my boy," he said comfortingly. "You passed up your chance. The old chief would have saved you, had you accepted his offer.

You should have seized your freedom and let me die on the altar."

"Never!" I declared. "It was freedom for *both* of us or for *neither*."

"Bosh!" he retorted. "You're just being quixotic. I'd have butted in while you were buzzing the old buzzard, but I hoped you might get away with it. Looked like you might, till that Ab-Nadik guy showed up."

"Skip it!" I snapped.

For a while we sat in the darkness, each busy with his own thoughts. Death was close at hand. It is one matter to face death in the heat of battle; it is another to face it in the quiet calm darkness of a stinking prison cell.

I knew that Hammersmith felt the same as I. He reached over and clasped my hand warmly in the dense darkness. No fear in that clasp—only an attempt to probe what lay ahead, that which has baffled men since time began. Weak and wounded, he awaited death—unafraid.

Suddenly, I released his hand. "Look!" I whispered.

His gaze followed mine down the corridor. Someone, carrying a torch, was coming toward the dungeon.

It was Esta, alone!

In one hand she carried the torch and in the other a large brass hoop strung with heavy iron keys.

A hurried word of greeting. Then the barred door of our cell was unlocked and swung open. Esta handed the torch to the pale Hammersmith; then I clasped her slim, warm body in my arms. It was a long, long embrace, filled with pent-up emotion. I could feel the rapid beating of her heart against my breast. Was there ever such a courageous girl as she?

"How did you get away, Esta, dear?"

"I slipped out while father and Ab-Nadik held council!"

Again I embraced her.

Finally she gently pushed away from me, and said,

"Hurry, beloved. There is a secret passage out of this dungeon. There are sliths, saddled and awaiting, beneath the city wall."

"How many sliths?" I asked, scarce daring to hope.

"Three," she replied, with bashful downcast eyes.

A fierce wild joy surged through me. I straightened my shoulders and drew a deep breath.

"Lead on!" I cried.

DOWN the dark corridor we followed the girl, until she paused at a heavy barred door at one side, and unlocked it.

"The treasure chamber of Daloss," she whispered.

And indeed it was! The light of the torch, held high by Captain Hammersmith, disclosed unnumbered bars of solid gold piled high about the walls. Brass-bound chests, containing who knows what wealth, filled the center of the room.

"Precious jewels," said Esta, noting the direction of my gaze.

One chest stood open, overflowing with the thin gold minted slabs which pass for coinage on Mars.

"Take!" the girl commanded. "We shall need them."

But I shook my head.

"I am robbing thy father of a more precious jewel than any of these," I said. "And that is enough to have on my conscience. I am no common thief."

She sighed. Then gazed at me with blue eyes full of approval.

Suddenly she stiffened, alert with listening.

"Someone comes," she said fearfully. "If he finds the cell empty, he

will try this door, knowing it to be the only possible means for your escape. Unfortunately it does not lock on the inside." She unsnapped the huge key-ring from the key in the lock, and handed the key-ring to me, as she continued breathlessly,

"Quick! That other door over there, across the treasure chamber, leads to the secret passage. I will lock the door through which we entered, and hold back whoever comes, until you have time to reach the sliths."

Brushing a kiss on my forehead, she snatched the torch from Hammersmith's hand, and darted from the chamber, shutting and locking the door behind her. We two Legionnaires were in darkness—alone.

It had all happened with such stupefying swiftness, that I had had no chance to remonstrate. And now she was gone—my Esta!

I crowded my ear to the door, in an effort to learn what was going on in the corridor outside. Esta was speaking.

"Oh, my father, do not ask me."

"So, it is you! Ab-Nadik was right. You did loose the Earthmen crraats from their cell," came Mu-Lai's voice. "You, my trusted daughter, descendant of the Dark Star himself! Where are the prisoners?"

"I—I will not say, Father. I—I love him so."

"Perhaps in the treasure room," suggested the savage voice of Ab-Nadik. "If she would cheat *me* of my love, she would not be above cheating *you* of your jewels."

"Ah—could it be?" Mu-Lai snarled. "We shall see. I have a key."

I heard a scuffle, evidently Esta trying to keep her father away from the door. Then came his voice.

"Aside, girl. You have vexed me enough today. If you are a traitor—"

Hammersmith spoke in my ear.

"Warren—come. They'll be inside in a minute."

I dreaded to leave Esta to the savage mercy of her angry father, yet there was no other course. Free—perhaps I could come back to rescue her. Imprisoned—I would die, unable to help her.

I STUMBLED across the room. Once I bumped against a chest—an open one, filled with the slablike coins. My hand clasped one, and I slid it into the pocket of my blouse—as a souvenir of Daloss. I have it still, an unbelievably ancient Martian coin, solid proof to me of my adventure, when sometimes even I doubt that it could have happened.

"Here." Hammersmith reached for my hand in the darkness. "I have the door open. There's a tunnel ahead."

Hurriedly we stepped into the tunnel, as a key grated in the lock of the main door of the treasure chamber behind us. Hammersmith closed our exit and locked it.

"They will be delayed getting *that* open," he said grimly. "Now, let's move for those sliths."

Rapidly we proceeded along the dark tunnel. Esta had said it led to freedom, and we knew that she would not betray us. Sliths were awaiting us, she had said. But how could I bear to leave Daloss without her?

Finally we saw faint light far ahead. We pushed forward, and came to a small barred iron grating hidden in a gully of shrubs. The grating was locked.

"One of these keys ought to do the trick," Hammersmith said grimly, lifting the huge key-ring. "I hope those fellows got detained in the treasure room."

With fumbling nervous fingers he tried one key after the other. At last a

key slipped into place, and the lock mechanism turned. The grating gave way at our touch, and we stood in the silvery starlight of a Martian mountain night.

Three sliths, saddled and bridled, and slung with food and water, were tethered behind some bushes to our right.

"The girl did not lie," breathed Hammersmith. "Here are our mounts!"

But I shook my head. A mad desire for Esta surged within my veins.

"I must go back to get her," I said bitterly. "I cannot leave her behind."

"You are right!" spoke a guttural Martian voice nearby. "You cannot leave her behind, for you yourself shall never depart from here."

A tall figure in flowing cape rushed from the bushes, brandishing a javelin.

"Infidel, you die! I suspected you would try to escape this way."

It was Ab-Nadik. The man had evidently circled back alone, while Mu-Lai was following us through the treasure room passage.

DESPERATELY, I glanced about for some weapon of defense. I saw a long lichen branch lying in the bushes near me. It was about five feet long and several inches thick.

Hammersmith, though weak from his many wounds, also saw the stick and lunged for it just as I did. Faster, however, was I; and up I came with it clenched tightly in my right hand.

Ab-Nadik loomed above me. I saw the quick flash of moonlight on his downward-thrust blade; saw beyond it the triumphant leer of the white teeth in his copper-hued face.

With one despairing effort, I swung the stick forward and upward at the shaft of his spear with all the strength in my body.

Crash! Wood hit metal shaft, and sent it hurtling away out of Ab-Nadik's hands, to fall with a rattling clangor on a nearby rock. My soft lichen stick bucked under the impact. I cast it away.

"Now, you heathen murderer," I snarled, "it's my turn to crow!"

Like two madmen we met. A sinewy fist sent stars whirling before my eyes, but I did not fall. Instead my own fist bored into his ribs.

I heard the Martian grunt. His arms flayed blows at me, but I would not yield. Again my fist shot out. This time a louder grunt.

My dazed bloodshot eyes caught a glimpse of a sagging face before me. Quickly I shot still another blow at that vision, felt knuckles sting from the impact.

I looked again, and the vision was gone.

"Come on. You knocked him cold. Let's light out before any more come."

It was Hammersmith. Vaguely I could make out his swaying form on a slith.

Stumbling through a red haze, I groped my way to one of the sliths, and somehow managed to clamber astride it.

"But what about Esta?" I groaned. "We can't desert *her*."

"Okay, Warren. I'm with you. I'll go back and fight the whole crowd for you. I'll—"

Hammersmith slumped forward on his slith's neck. Game to the end in spite of his wounds, he had at last fainted dead away.

I could not leave him, for I owed him a loyalty higher than love. Riding close to his mount, I lifted him across my saddle, grabbed his reins, and set out for the mountain pass which led to the red sands of the great desert of Mars.

The third slith whined softly, sending a pang through my heart, for *that* beast was to have carried my Esta.

In the pass, I revived Hammersmith with water from a small skin in one of the saddle-bags. Then we dashed past the Mauro sentries at the outer defile, and were on the open desert, now lit by the full glare of both moons.

THE rest of our journey across the red sands is an uncertain nightmare to me. I have a vague recollection of hiding the keys in some rocks. I remember reaching our old encampment, only to find it abandoned. Then of pushing on to the canal city of Ricca, winter quarters of the Martian forces. Our water gave out. Hammersmith died—at least, I think so. At any rate, I remember burying his body. And I slid off my slith and dropped unconscious on the desert sands, within sight of the first Martian sentry at Ricca.

Of course, I was tried for treason and desertion. They could not make the first charge stick; for, after all, the Capital City *had* ordered the attack on Daloss. Furthermore, a conviction for treason must be reported to the higher-ups, and pig-eyed old Colonel Ak-Ak was afraid of the effect of such a report. But they did convict me of desertion.

My sentence was three long Martian years in the penal labor battalion. I have five more days to serve, and then I shall be free!

Three thousand of us, I say. There were three thousand of us, who rode like mad, with sabers held high and hell in our eyes, into Daloss, the City of Lost Souls—but only one returned.

And he, as soon as he is free, will not return to the Earth, but rather will struggle back across the red desert sands of Mars to the City of Lost Souls, where—he hopes and trusts—his Esta will be waiting for him.

3 TERR

by John York Cabot

YOU'VE heard of Terrence Titwillow. He's the fellow who wrote all those spine-chilling mystery yarns, such as the *Case Of The Bloody Bishop*, *Death Is So Definite*, and *Murder By The Millions*, just to mention a few.

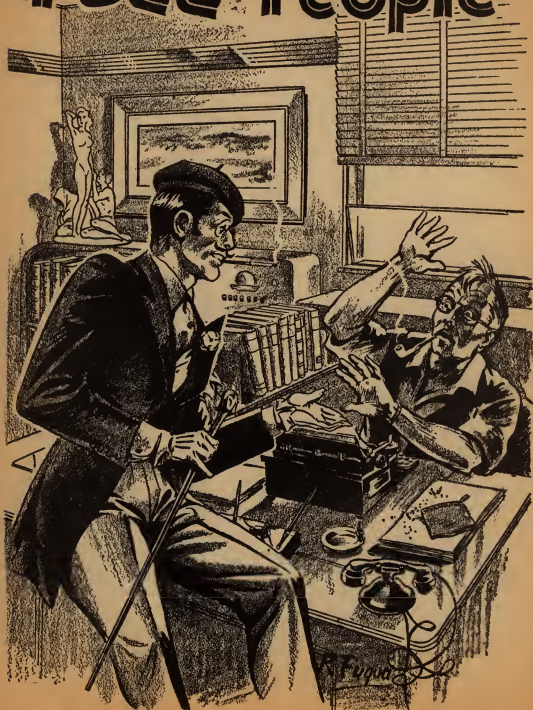
Terrence and I used to be fellow hacks. We wrote for the same magazines and frequented the same dens of debauchery. But when he wrote his first best-selling novel, *The Severed Left Ear Of A Lady*, he moved out of my class completely, socially and professionally. Except for almost yearly occasions when he'd invite me up to his penthouse to pour a few down the drain and talk over old times, I would have lost track of him completely. Terrence had gone big-time and I was still small fry.

It was a distinct surprise, therefore, when my telephone rang one December evening and I picked up the receiver to hear the voice of Terrence Titwillow on the other end of the wire.

"Hello, h-hello, Danny. This is Terry Titwillow."

They were holy terrors, these three characters out of Titwillow's typewriter. Fine stuff in a novel—but sheer devils when they came alive

IBLE People



"I'm Pierre, the personable Parisian," he said. "One of your characters, remember?"

"Well," I said, feeling like a fool, "well, well. How are you, Terry? What do you know?"

"Plenty," he said, and in that instant I caught something strained, odd, in his voice. Something I couldn't place, a sort of ragged fear. "Plenty," he said again, "but I haven't time for that now. I'm in a hell of a mess, Danny. An awful mess." The fear seemed sharper. "I have to see you, Danny. You've been my best friend in the old days. You're still the only one I can trust. I have to see you."

"When?" I asked, slightly soured at this old-pal hokum.

"Right now," he answered, and I think his voice split an octave on the last syllable. "It's terribly important!"

I hesitated for an instant. It was cold outside, and a good half hour ride to his apartment, a Michigan Avenue penthouse. If I was such a pal, such a damned fine friend in need, why had he waited so long to remember it? Then sentiment took control. Maybe he *was* in trouble. And, after all, we used to be broke together.

"Okay," I replied. "I'll be right over."

In ten minutes I was out in the cold, kicking the starter of my refrigerated jalopy and cursing myself for a chump. This was a hell of a night to be leaving a warm house.

After about ten minutes of driving, I turned on the radio figuring that maybe some hot dance music would warm me a bit. But there wasn't any dance music right then. Just an excited news announcer babbling about some sort of a crime wave that had been holding Chicago in its grip for the past forty-eight hours. I'd lived in Chicago for most of my life, so I was most unimpressed. But one bulletin snapped my head up.

"Flash," said the announcer. "A report has just come into the station, but is as yet unverified. It is believed that the fabulous Coanor Diamond has been stolen!"

The Coanor Diamond!

For a minute I couldn't believe it. Everyone who had been reading the papers in the past two weeks was aware of the fact that the incredibly priceless gem had been brought into Chicago less than a month after its discovery in South America. Some wealthy Chicago merchant had bought the thing. Paid a tremendous price for it.

And now it was believed stolen.

"What a story," I thought. "What a *helluva* good story!" I was so excited that I nearly hit a lamppost. And then, just as I was eagerly awaiting further information from the announcer, a dance band came back onto the air. Disgusted, I snapped it off.

I WAS still ruminating on the possibilities of the diamond theft when I drew up in front of Terrence Titwillow's apartment. Along with my magazine hacking, amateur crime speculation had always interested me intensely. It must have taken some awfully clever work to lift the Coanor. Rumor had it that the thing was guarded night and day by a cordon of ten policemen.

But I pushed the news item to the back of my mind as I pressed the button on the elevator which would lift me to the penthouse hovel of Terrence Titwillow. I wondered what he could have called me for.

He was at the door of his apartment when I arrived, which was quite a surprise. Usually he'd let the butler admit me on my other visits—to impress me. But there was no butler this time, just Terrence Titwillow, standing there

in the door wearing Chinese pajamas, and with a wild gleam in his eye.

"Danny," he croaked, and I saw that he had a full three days' beard stubble on his jawline. Bleary bloodshot eyes, too. I gaped, for I'd never seen him in such bad shape.

"Jeeeeeeudas," I managed to say at last. "What in the devil have you been doing to yourself? Growing ragged from those literary teas?"

He grabbed my hand as though I might run away. "It's terrible, Danny. Simply terrible!"

While I threw my hat and coat on the hall table, Terrence stood there wringing his hands dismally and looking like a fat and troubled edition of Humpty-dumpty. Terrence had always been given to excess flesh, and the fact that he was as bald as an egg and less than five feet three in his bare feet added nothing to his glamour.

His pajamas, hideous black and pink things embellished with rampant dragons, clung to his paunchy frame in a dejected sort of way. He was holding an unlighted cigarette drooped from the corner of his twitching mouth, giving the impression that his hands might be too damp to strike a match.

"Tell me all," I said with enough melodrama to cover the situation.

Terrence nodded and shuffled across the room to where he had several glasses already waiting on a tray. He gave me one, and gulped down the other in a lightning gesture. From the tremble in his hands I could tell that he was bearing down heavily on the stuff.

"Well," I repeated, "what's it all about?"

"It's a long story, Danny. A long and terrible story. Maybe you aren't going to believe me. I haven't dared hint at it to anyone else, and if you don't believe me, I'll go utterly raving mad!" There was a passionate plead-

ing in his voice, and suddenly I felt a surge of pity for the man. Here was genius on the verge of going *phfffffft!*

"Go ahead, Terrence," I said as consolingly as I could. "Go ahead and get it off your chest."

HE ran a trembling hand over his third chin and reached for the scotch decanter and soda siphon.

"You remember my first best seller, Danny, *The Severed Left Ear Of A Lady?*"

"Of course," I nodded.

"Remember what the critics said about it?"

I frowned. What the hell, had he brought me up here to remind him of all his nice press clippings?

"Yeah," I answered curtly. "They said that it was a corker. I think they said that your ability to create living and breathing characters would carry you a long way. You were always good at characterization."

"Unusually vivid characterization, Danny," said Terry nodding excitedly. "That's what they said. Characters that lived and breathed!" He gulped his drink and filled himself another.

"That's right," I went on. "All the rest of your stuff got the same raves. Critics claimed that you were the only crime author in the racket who could get away with weak plots and still write best sellers. Of course, they said that your characterization was the key-note of your work. But," I frowned again, and my voice must have been sharp, impatient, "I don't see what in the dickens that—"

He broke in hurriedly.

"Don't get me wrong, Danny. I'm not breaking my arm. I didn't get you up here to listen to self-adulation. I'm just telling you this because it's terribly important. Terribly important in view of," his voice quavered, "*in view*

of what has happened."

"I don't get it." I was becoming thoroughly disgusted by now. Being called out of a warm house on a cold night to listen to a drunk babble on about his deft characterization didn't appeal to me. "Get to the point. If there's something I can do to help you, okay. But if you just want to talk shop—"

"But Danny," Terry was pleading now. "That *is* the point! That's the all-important point. My characterization, my vivid, utterly real characterization. The thing that the critics have raved about in every book I've written. And now it's boomeranged!"

I rose to my feet. I could see it all clearly now. Titwillow, bless his drunken hide, had been on a bat. Been on a bat and was now in need of someone to hash over his past successes. I'd been picked as the goat.

"Look," I said coldly. "You'll be all right in the morning. Take a cold shower; get your self a bro—"

"But Danny!" He leaped to his feet, folded his hands in an imploring gesture. "Danny, I'm not tight. I wish I were. Oh, I wish I were stinking drunk! But I'm not. Please. I'll get to it in a moment. But all this I've been telling you is vitally important."

"Okay," I said. "I'll give you just two minutes to get to the point. What is it?"

"The characters I created in my novels!"

"I don't get it yet. Get to the point!"

"You remember my characters, Danny. There were three of them on which I built all my stuff."

"Yeah, I know. But what has this all got to do wi—"

"Those three characters, Danny. Honest-to-God, may the heavens strike

me dead if I lie, *have come to life!*" His voice was an almost hysterical scream, and his gimlet eyes fixed wildly on me.

I turned and walked out into the hall to get my coat.

CHAPTER II

Pierre, the Personable Parisian

"DANNY, Danny," Terry's voice was hoarse, pleading. "Don't walk out on me. For the love of heaven, for the chums we once were, for the sake of those good old days, Danny, wait!" He had followed me into the hall.

"Nuts," I growled. "All you need, my fat and successful friend, is a bromo." I slid one arm into my coat.

"Danny!"

"Goodnight!"

"But, Danny, they've come alive. My three biggest characters. I'm not crazy, man. *They've come alive!*"

I was busy looking for my hat, coldly ignoring the rum-pot babblings of my old pal, when I absently reached into my inner pocket for my wallet.

"Danny, believe me, they're here in this very apartment!"

I wheeled on him.

"Where in the hell is my wallet?"

This threw him off the track.

"Wallet?" he muttered. "Don't know where your wallet is. I haven't got it." Then, suddenly, a foolish expression slid slowly onto his face. "Seeeeeee," he screamed. "There! I told you they'd come alive. Pierre must have taken it!"

I was boiling mad by now. If he thought in his drunken mind that he could make me stay by hiding my wallet like a child! This was the last straw.

"Look," I said slowly, very frigidly, "*give me my wallet!*"

"Pierre has it!" Terry was triumphant, a very sick sort of triumph, however. Like a man who has proved he hasn't any legs.

"And who in the hell is Pierre? A new butler? Tell him to bring it here, pronto!" Maybe I was shouting a little.

"Pierre, you know Pierre. He's one of my characters, Danny!" My drunken chum backed a few paces away as I balled my fists. "Pierre, the personable Parisian, Danny. You remember Pierre. He was one of my most vivid characters, Danny." Terry was backing away, his voice hoarse and squeaky. "I created Pierre in my second novel, *Case of the Bloody Bishop*.^{*} AND NOW HE'S COME ALIVE, TOO!"

In a single bound, I had Titwillow by his pajama collar, all my rage exploding in a single gesture.

"Look," I bellowed. "I'll give you just two seconds to give me back my wallet and let me get out of here!"

I had raised my fist above poor Terry's frightened face, when a voice came from behind me.

"You are looking for your wallet, *mon vieux*?"

I wheeled, releasing my grasp on Terry. And as I gazed pop-eyed at the speaker, I wished I'd hung onto Terry's collar, for my knees never needed support as badly as they did at that moment.

There, smiling suavely with white teeth beneath a dark waxed little moustache, was a dapper, exquisitely tailored little Frenchman, holding out my wallet!

"I told you so," I heard Terry gasp weakly. "It's Pierre!"

I'M not quite certain what my emotions were at that moment. I think I almost fainted. For I had read all of the Terrence Titwillow novels, and if Pierre, the personable Parisian, had ever stepped from their pages, he would have looked *exactly* like the smiling little Frenchy who confronted us now!

"Quite yes," murmured the Frenchy, nodding at Terry. "I am Pierre, the personable Parisian!"

I took my wallet and wheeled again on Titwillow.

"Look," I demanded, but without my former fury. "Who the hell is this guy? He looks like a Hollywood ham made up for the role of Pierre in a movie!"

Titwillow just shook his head sadly.

"I thought he *was* a ham actor, once, Danny. I thought all three of them were hams when I first saw them. Thought some of my friends had hired them to play a practical joke on me. But that was over a week ago. Since then I've learned better. It *is* Pierre, Danny. Believe me!"

The Frenchman tweaked the waxed ends of his moustache and bowed gracefully from the hips.

"A pleasure, *Monsieur, hola!*"

"Pleasure, hell," I snapped. "I'll take care of you later, buddy!" For suddenly it was all clear to me, down to the last detail. Undoubtedly some of Titwillow's waggish friends had cooked this all up on him. I knew, from reports, that Terry had been working awfully hard on his latest book. The strain had told on him, and some of his pseudo-chums must have hired this ham actor to slip into poor Terry's apartment and pretend he was Pierre come to life. Terry must have been in a hell of a state of nerves to accept such a childish trick as fact, but some-

^{*} *Case Of The Bloody Bishop*, by Terrence Titwillow. Published 1937, Channing-Moad Co. Story featured the adventures of Pierre, the personable Parisian, a sly, suave, Frenchman, jewel thief and crook extraordinary. Pierre appeared frequently in later novels by Terrence Titwillow. —ED.

times too much work can do funny things to an author.

I felt sorry for him. Sorry, and sore as hell at the louses who'd fixed up this impersonation on him. Didn't the fools realize it could have sent him off the deep end?

"Take it easy, Terry," I said softly. "Everything is going to be all right. You've just been working too hard, that's all. Someone's played a rotten practical joke on you. But don't worry. I'll handle this from now on."

He smiled feebly. "I know what you're thinking, Danny, and I appreciate it. But you're all wet. Believe me, you're all wet. That guy is Pierre. I've already proved it. And there are two others in the apartment, too."

"Others?" I frowned. "Do you mean to say that you have more than one of these phony PIERRES around?"

"No, just one Pierre. And he's not a phony, Danny. I'll prove it in a moment. What I mean to say is that my other two well-known characters, Snodbury Snipe, the super-sleuth of society, and Lady Ashington, the eccentric dowager fence, are also alive," his voice was subdued almost without emotion, now, "and here in the apartment."

"Monsieur Snipe and ze Lady Ashington are indeed here," the Frenchy cut in.

I glared at him.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur,*" the Frenchy drew himself up haughtily, "I am afraid you doubt your eyes!"

"Shut up!" I ordered. "I'll attend to you later!"

Then I took Terrence Titwillow by the arm and steered him back into the living room.

"Take me to those other two frauds, Terry," I said, "and I'll send the bunch of them out of here in a frenzy."

And at that instant, the two other "frauds" made their entrance. As in

the case of Pierre, I didn't have to look twice to recognize them as very excellent reproductions of Quaggle's famous Snodbury Snipe, and the equally celebrated fiction creation, Lady Ashington.*

THEY stepped out of Titwillow's study, and seemed surprised to see me. Surprised, but not particularly concerned. Snodbury Snipe, dressed in white tie and tails, looking keen, young, and bored, was astonishingly like Titwillow's characterization of him in his novels. Lady Ashington, weaving a bit (he had made her quite a drinker), loomed huge in a frilly gown and peered haughtily through a lorgnette.

"So," I snorted. "These are the other two frauds. Your chums went to great lengths to play their practical joke!"

At my words, Lady Ashington glanced inquiringly at Titwillow. She raised her lorgnette, and turned her owlish gaze on me. To him she said:

"And to whom do we owe the pleasure of meeting this rude stranger?"

Snodbury Snipe merely smiled in a careless, nonchalant way, and then turned his gaze to his immaculate cuffs.

"Look," I said menacingly. "You two are going to get the hell out of this apartment, pronto, or I'll call the cops. Haven't you, and whoever hired you, deviled Terry enough?"

"I'm sure," said Snodbury Snipe, smoothing out the lapels on his tailcoat, "that I haven't the foggiest notion of what you're trying to say, old fellow. Please be more explicit. If it's police you seek, mightn't I do?"

"Damn you all," I shouted. "Don't think that you can goof me the way

* Snodbury Snipe, young society sherlock, appeared first in *Murder By The Millions*, published in 1936 by Channing-Moad Co. Lady Ashington, the hard-drinking dowager "fence" was a character in the same novel.—Ep.

you've done with him. I meant what I said. Get out of here, quick, or you'll all be in the stir!"

"Fantastic character," murmured Lady Ashington under a heavily alcoholic breath. "What's his name, Terrence?"

"You see," Terry spread his hands in mute, beaten resignation. "They *are* real, Danny. I've been trying to tell you that I *know* they aren't hoaxes. I can prove it to you."

Pierre had followed us into the living room, and now put in his two cents.

"*Precisement*," he added. "We are all quite real, Monsieur. And Titwillow can prove it, *tres bien*."

It suddenly seemed as if the room were unbearably hot. Trip hammers had started a ceaseless tattoo in my head. This was getting to be far too much for me. Hoax or not, real or fake, I couldn't stand much more of it.

"Get them out of the room, Terry," I almost screamed, "I want to talk this thing over!"

Titwillow nodded. But he said nothing to them, merely walked over to his typewriter in the corner of the room. He sat down and inserted a sheet of white paper in the machine, typed out a sentence. I had followed him to the machine, and was looking over his shoulder as he typed. The sentence was, "Together they left the room."

I wheeled. Pierre, Snodbury Snipe and Lady Ashington *had* left the room!

TERRY smiled wanly at me.

"You see," he ran a trembling hand over his fourth chin, "this is how I *know* they are my characters!"

For a moment I almost believed him.

"But Terry, you fool, they heard me tell you to ask them to leave the room!"

Terry shook his head with infinite weariness. He typed out a second sentence. And as the letters sprang up I

read, "They returned to the room for an instant, then left again."

And before I could turn, I heard footsteps coming from Terry's study. When I faced the sounds, I saw Pierre, Snodbury, and Her Ladyship had re-entered the room. Re-entered the room, when they couldn't possibly have known what he had typed—*unless they were his characters!*

A moment passed while I considered the possibility that I had gone stark raving mad, and in that moment the three of them left the room once more!

"Good God, Terry," my voice must have been as hoarse and ragged as his own. "My God, you mean—"

"Yes," he said with simple, utter weariness, "it's just as I told you, Danny. *Those are my characters, right out of the books!*"

I turned and made my way shakily across the room. Titwillow said:

"You'll find the scotch in the cupboard, Danny."

"Thanks," I muttered. "I'm gonna need it!"

"As soon as you get straightened out a bit, I'll tell you exactly why I called you here." By now I was able to marvel at my friend's comparative serenity. It was a wonder that he hadn't cracked completely. Even now, he seemed to have calmed a great deal, just from the knowledge that someone else shared his utterly impossible, horribly incredible problem.

"Yes," said Terrence Titwillow, after I'd gulped down four fingers from my glass. "You can help me more than you'll imagine."

I nodded numbly, scarcely hearing him, pouring out four more fingers into my glass.

"For you see," he said, and some of the shakiness, the ragged terror, crept back into his voice, "I have the Coanor Diamond!"

The glass, the scotch, the decanter, crashed to the floor, just as though they had been knocked from my trembling hands by a baseball bat.

"You *what*?" I screeched.

"Pierre stole it two days ago," Terry said.

CHAPTER III

The Terrible Three

I SAT down abruptly. My knees were knocking together like castanets and the ornately furnished room was spinning dizzily before my eyes.

"Don't say any more," I said weakly, "until you open another bottle of scotch. If I must go crazy I want to do it with a drink in my hand."

Without another word, Terrence waddled to a well-stocked liquor cabinet and returned with two stiff jolts of scotch.

I tossed mine down neat, then hunched forward on the edge of my chair.

"Was I dreaming?" I asked in a whisper, "or did you really say Pierre stole the Coanor diamond?"

Terrence shook his head miserably.

"It's the absolute truth, Danny." He shuddered visibly and then plunged on: "Let me start at the beginning, Danny. I've thought about this thing until I was sure I was going bats, but I'm beginning to get an idea about what's behind all this."

"Shoot!" I said. "If the gentlemen in white jackets don't break up our little party, I'll listen till the cows come home."

"First," Terrence said excitedly, "look at my typewriter!" His plump index finger shot out in the direction of his desk, on which rested a bulky, gleaming, old-fashioned typewriter. "Do you notice anything unusual about

it?" he asked breathlessly.

I was past the point of being surprised at anything my erstwhile chum could say or do.

"No," I said with judicial calm, "I don't notice anything unusual about it."

Terrence mopped his damp brow and stared at the black gleaming typewriter in something very like terror.

"But there *is* something unusual about it," he cried, "horribly unusual."

He was trembling again, his plump little body quivering like a blob of jelly.

"Steady," I said, more for my own benefit than his, "calm down and tell me what you mean."

Terrence Titwillow made a visible effort to get himself under control.

"All right," he said hoarsely, "I said I'd start from the beginning, didn't I? Well, I'll try to." He stood up then, lighted a cigarette and began pacing nervously back and forth in front of me.

"About a week or so ago," he said, "a salesman came here and tried to sell me a typewriter. He wasn't an ordinary salesman by a long shot." Terrence stopped speaking and shuddered at the recollection. Then he went on: "He was a tall, somber looking creature, dressed in black clothes and one of those funny string ties the artists wear. When I opened the door he peered at me through thick tortoise shell glasses and murmured:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I said, 'I want a typewriter—NO!'," and slammed the door in his face. But in about an hour he was back. Asked me the same question. It kind of got my goat and I told him to clear out and stay out. He gave me a kind of long sly smile and murmured something under his breath and walked away. I thought he must be some kind of a nut so I forgot about the whole thing. Then," Terrence paused and mopped his brow feverishly, "a day or

so later the bell rang and it was him again. Dressed in black, smiling sadly, peering at me through tortoise shell spectacles. He asked me the same question:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I chased him away," Terrence babbled, his voice suddenly going ragged, "but the next day he was waiting for me in my car. I called the police, but he was gone by the time they got there. The next day he was waiting at my club. I had the management throw him out, but that night he was back here again. Still dressed in black, still smiling sadly, still asking his infernal question:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I GUESS I went a little crazy," Terrence muttered, "but I had stood all I could. I jumped on him. I hit him in the face. I rolled him down the steps. I called him every name I could think of. I threatened him with murder and mayhem if I ever set eyes on him again. I finally stopped, but only from lack of breath."

Terrence suddenly gulped the untouched drink which he held in his hand.

"He was still smiling sadly," Titwallow continued frantically, "as he stood up and brushed off his long black coat. He straightened the tortoise shell glasses on his bony nose and peered up at me.

"'So,' he said gloomily, 'you do not want a typewriter, yes?'"

"Then," Terrence said hollowly, "he left. Never a backward glance or anything. He just left and I haven't seen him since."

To say I was irritated with Terrence's long and pointless story would be putting it mildly.

"So what?" I snapped. "What's all that got to do with the Coanor diamond and the rest of your troubles?"

"It's got everything to do with it," Terrence cried wildly, "for the day after that a package came for me and when I opened it I found that blasted typewriter in it. There was a note signed *Admirer* with it and that was all. I had forgotten about the typewriter salesman so I went ahead and wrote a few chapters with this infernal machine." Terrence slumped into a chair and buried his head in his plump hands. "You know what happened then," Terrence cried out in a strangled groan, "Pierre and Lady Ashington and Snipe come to life."

"Now look here," I said, with a nice blend of hysteria and exasperation, "you don't expect me to believe such rot as that."

"But it's the only solution," Terrence said frantically. "This damnable machine he sent to me is bewitched. The people it writes about come to life. He knew what would happen. He knew the terrible, hopeless mess it would get me into. It's his way of paying me back. Don't you see?" Terrence was almost sobbing outright now, "this is his revenge on me for the way I treated him."

I got up and poured myself a drink. A stiff one. I would have liked to get stinking drunk, but I knew there was no chance of that.

"Look," I said, in an attempt at reason, "it isn't so important *how* those characters got here. The important thing is that they *are* here and that you're in a sweet mess. The first job is to get that straightened out if there's any way under heaven we can. Tell me when you discovered these characters of yours and then tell me how and when Pierre copped the Coanor diamond."

Terrence lifted his head from his hands, stared at me with his red-rimmed despairing eyes.

"Monday afternoon," he said dully, "I wrote a chapter on this typewriter. It was for my latest book in which I intended to combine my three most famous characters, Lady Ashington, Pierre and Snodbury Snipe. The chapter I wrote brought all of them into the story. That was all I did that day. I went out to the club, got pretty drunk I'm afraid, and then late that night I returned home."

"And that's when you met Pierre?" I asked.

TERRY nodded.

"He appeared last Monday night. I found him waiting for me in the study when I came home from the club."

"And of course you thought you were drinking too much?"

"Naturally. I snapped off the lights, making a concerted effort of will factors to ignore him, and went to bed. When I got up in the morning he was still there." Titwillow shook his head, as though trying to lose the memory of that horrifying moment. "I saw him and thought instantly that I was in the throes of a staggering hangover. So I ran to the kitchen for another drink."

"And that's where you saw Lady Ashington?"

"Yes, she was there, gloriously drunk and peering owlishly down at me through her lorgnette."

"Gad, what a shock!"

"You've no idea," continued Terry, shuddering. "I rushed to the window, set to hurl myself out—when Snodbury Snipe stepped out from behind one of the drapes in the living room and stopped me!"

"Ughhyh!"

"Ghastly, it was more than I could stand. Then, just as you suspected at first, I thought that perhaps some of my friends had hired ham actors to

scare the hell out of me. I told all three of them, Pierre, Lady Ashington, and Snipe, to leave my house. They just laughed; and Pierre stole my watch." Titwillow shuddered again.

"And then?" I inquired.

"Then I got my idea for proof. I figured"—Terry went on—"that if they were *really* my characters, I should be able to control them, affect them, just with this typewriter."

I nodded.

"Just as you proved their existence to me."

Terry grimaced.

"I sat down at the typewriter and wrote a sentence ordering them to lie down on the floor and roll over."

"And," I said, "of course they did?"

Terry nodded.

"But I was still unconvinced. So I put in additional character touches. I gave Pierre a streak of gray at his temples. Made Snipe a little heavier around the midriff, and put an extra set of wrinkles around Lady Ashington's brow. When I looked, all the changes were there, just as written!"

It was my turn to shudder.

Terry shook his head sadly.

"There was only one thing to do. I got roaring drunk, immediately and without further ado!" His voice was growing shaky again. "Which," he concluded, "was the worst thing in the world I ever could have done."

I sensed that the explanation of the theft of the Coanor Diamond was approaching, and waited for him to continue.

"I woke about four o'clock the following morning," he said hoarsely, "and found myself tied to my chair!"

"Tied?"

Terry nodded.

"Tied to my chair, and I noticed, too, that the strange typewriter had been locked on me. All three of my char-

acters were gone!" He sighed deeply. "They had sensed that I was able to hold control of them so long as I was at the typewriter. They had sensed that, and tied me up deliberately, locking the typewriter as an extra precaution." His voice trembled. "They never could have done it, if I hadn't been so stinking swaffed!"

I WAS beginning to see the thing take shape.

"Hours later they returned and untied me," Titwillow resumed. "But it was too late for me to repair the damage done, and they knew it. For they had been running loose throughout the city for fully forty-eight hours. Forty-eight hours, Danny," his voice rose hysterically, "while those lunatics, creatures of this infernal typewriter, ran riot!"

"And during that time," I managed to say, "Pierre stole the Coanor Diamond?"

Terry nodded.

"He stole the Coanor and everything else around Chicago that appealed to him. *He has over a half-million dollars in jewels lying in a suitcase in my study, Danny!*"

"Good God!" I blurted.

There were tears in Titwillow's eyes as he continued.

"You haven't been listening to the radio, Danny, or reading the papers?"

"No," I confessed, "I haven't read a paper in the last forty-eight hours, and the only radio broadcast I heard was the announcement of the Coanor theft, while I was on my way here."

Terry rose, and walked over to his desk. Opening it, he pulled forth a stack of newspapers. He returned and threw these into my lap.

"This should give you a running account of what my creations managed to accomplish while they were loose."

I looked at the first paper, a headline from the *Chicago Trib* standing forth, "CITY IN GRIP OF ASTONISHING CRIME WAVE!" My hand flipped the *Trib* over, found a copy of the *Daily News*, "LAKE FOREST HOMES PILLAGED; GEMS STOLEN!" The *Daily Times* declared, "McCORMICK JEWEL COLLECTION HEISTED!"

"All this is the work of Pierre?" I asked. How any one person could have lifted so much in such a short time was beyond my ken.

"Don't forget," Terry said hoarsely, "that I made Pierre the *perfect* crook. His instincts for crime are flawless!"

"How about Lady Ashington," I wondered. "Where does she come into this picture?"

"Lady Ashington, as you'll recall, was a female fence in all my novels," Terry replied, holding forth another paper. "She was the gal who disposed of all crime loot for Pierre!"

I scanned the paper he handed me, a copy of the *Herald-American*. "Police On Trail Of Gem Thief," ran the first streamer. "Link Trail To That Of Female Fence," the second streamer declared.

"A drunken dowager-duchess type of woman, riding a milk horse and singing bawdy ballads through the loop, early in the morning hours, yesterday, tried to force her way into five of Chicago's largest jewelry stores.

Passersby who noticed her, told police that she insisted she carried untold loot which she wanted to sell to the proprietors. No one made any effort to stop her, and the stores all being closed, the strange woman rode away singing drunkenly before the police arrived."

"THIS," I gasped, "is awful! Supposing the police find out that Lady Ashington's trail leads here?"

Titwillow looked gray at the corners of his mouth.

"They haven't as yet, and I'm hoping they won't." He held forth another

paper. "If they do," he moaned, it will be because of this sort of thing. Read it."

The paper was the *Trib* again, a later issue. The drop read, "MYSTERIOUS STRANGER CALLS POLICE TO GIVE TIPS ON CRIME WAVE." The story went as follows:

"Police today are narrowing down a number of telephone tips received in connection with the forty-eight hour crime wave ravaging the city. A cultured-voiced young man has made ten such calls to the Central Detective Bureau, offering his assistance in the solution of the crime wave. So far, police have been unable to trace the calls to their source. Last-minute leads indicate that they may have further information on this within twenty-four hours."

"Snodbury Snipe?" I said, knowing damned well that it was.

Terry nodded.

"Yes. He says that he can offer his valuable sleuthing abilities to the local constabulary and solve the thing in more than record time. He says he's merely waiting until the moment when they are completely stymied. Then he will step into the mystery, very dramatically, in the best tradition of my novels, and unsnarl the thing for them!"

"But," I said, not realizing how asinine I must have sounded, "this is awful!"

"Do you realize," he squealed, and all of the old hysteria was returning to his voice, "do you realize what this will mean to me, what it will do to my reputation, my career?"

"But *why* did they do it?"

"They said that they were disgusted with me," he moaned. "My own characters, disgusted with me!"

"Disgusted?"

"Yes, they said that my plots were growing more and more silly with every succeeding novel. Said they were tired of doing such childish things as I made them do!"

"They said they wanted some real,

honest-to-goodness, red-blooded action. They said I was a character writer, and nothing better. They wanted to humiliate me, Danny. They deliberately went to work to create such a horrible mess that a genius couldn't unsnarl it!"

"I can agree with that," I muttered.

"And then," Terry rose to his feet, and as he rose his voice did likewise, "*they defied me to unsnarl the muddle they'd made!*"

TERRY was sobbing now, and his small, fat shoulders shook tremulously.

"So that's how you're going to be able to help me, Danny!" he groaned at last. "That's why I called you. You may be a hack, but you have an unholy adroitness at plotting. Your plots have always been superb, Danny!"

"But I don't see," I protested, ignoring the unflattering remarks about my hack tendencies, "how I can help you. What under the sun can I do?"

Terrence Titwillow lifted his head from his tear-stained paws.

"Don't you see?" he bleated. "The only way I can control these . . . these characters, is on this infernal typewriter. But I'm exhausted, Danny, I'm losing what little control I did have over them. And in addition to that, I'll need super-colossal plotting to get them out of their horrible mess!"

"You want *me* to plot them out of this?" It was suddenly dawning on me.

He nodded, his round, tear-stained face fixed anxiously on me. Anxiously, with a pleading-dog expression.

Every instinct, from that of self-preservation on, warned me to get out of this mess while the getting was good. They were his characters, not mine. It was his misfortune. I could leave now, and it would never affect my life again.

But maybe it was due to Titwillow's unconsciously dirty crack about me being a hack, or it might have been his flattery and respect for my plotting. I don't know. At any rate, I suddenly made my decision. I took the challenge

"Okay," I said. "Let's get down to work on this thing. It's going to be an age-old battle of the literary world—plotting versus sharp characterization!"

CHAPTER IV

Lady Ashington Complicates Matters

TERRENCE TITWILLOW grabbed my hand, while crocodile tears rolled down his fat cheeks.

"Danny," he muttered huskily, "Danny, I'll never forget this."

I was smiling, in a superior sort of way, I'm afraid, for in the back of my brain I could already see the solution beginning to shape. Terry must have caught the cat-ate-the-canary look on my phizz, for he blurted:

"Danny, good Lord, Danny. What is it? Have you got—"

"A solution?" I broke in. "Absolutely, old bean. I've a solution that's so remarkably simple, it's a pity you didn't think of it sooner."

I fished into my pocket for a cigarette. This was a moment I relished.

I lighted the cigarette, timing the words as dramatically as I could.

"Kill them," I said simply. "Just kill them, that's all you have to do, Terry."

"Danny!"

I looked full at him, expecting to find rapt admiration accompanying his ejaculation. Looked at Terrence Titwillow and got the shock of my life. Horror was written on his face.

"Danny," he repeated, aghast. "I

can't *kill* them. Why, the very thought is horrible. They're *alive*, Danny. Don't you understand? I'm the reason why they're alive. Even on a typewriter, killing them now would be like murdering actual people."

There was such unspoken indictment in his tones that I suddenly felt like a combination of Bluebeard and Jack the Ripper. And I knew then that my hack solution would never do. He would never condone the willful murder of his characters. However, I tried one last angle.

"What have they done for you? What have they done for you, except make trouble?"

Tears were starting afresh in the eyes of Terrence Titwillow. He shook his head sadly from side to side.

"Danny," he murmured. "I could never bring myself to such an action, never. I know that they've brought me nothing but trouble. I'm aware that they deliberately made this mess to jam me up. But I could *never* kill them."

"Let me, then," I offered. "I'll bump them off on the typewriter without so much as blinking an eye. They wouldn't be the first characters I've killed off when my plots got too jammed up."

He shook his head again.

"No, Danny. I could never permit it. No."

"Then what the hell do you expect to do? The cops are going to track those three morons back to your apartment sooner or later. The loot will be found here, and you're going to be in a helluva mess!"

And at that moment Snodbury Snipe chose to saunter back into the room. His gray eyes swept carelessly over the scene, but he didn't say a word. Just walked over to the telephone.

I was about to say something to him,

but he started dialing a number. Something held me motionless while I watched him. Then he was speaking into the phone.

"Hello," said Snodbury Snipe, "hello, old boy. Is this the police department?"

I MUST have leaped across the room in a split second, grabbing the telephone from Snodbury's hand and slamming it back on the hook.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Snipe gave me a frosty look.

"I have decided," he said, "to lend my invaluable assistance to the stupid police of this metropolis."

I was across the room to Titwillow's typewriter in an instant. My fingers flew across the keys. A moment later and I looked down at what I had written.

"Snodbury Snipe abandoned any idea of telephoning the police."

"There," I gasped, "that ought to hold you."

Snipe looked undecisively at the telephone a moment, then shrugged his well-tailored shoulders and walked out of the room once more.

"Terry," I fairly shouted, rushing over to the couch and grabbing him by the shoulder. "I can control your characters, too."

He just looked up at me dully.

"Of course," he said. "There's not much trick to it. They're creations of my brain, but they respond to this damnable typewriter."

As he was speaking, I heard a sharply indrawn breath behind me and wheeled to face Pierre, the personable Parisian. He had entered the room and come up behind me so softly that I hadn't been aware of it.

"*Monsieur*," Pierre bowed gallantly from the waist, "when are the police coming?"

"The police?" I was shocked to think that this knave could speak so calmly of the cops after what he'd done.

"*Oui*, the *gendarmes*. When are they coming to surround the apartment?"

"Surround the apartment?"

"*Precisement*, when are they coming? *Monsieur* Titwillow always has the *gendarmes* surrounding me in apartments."

"Oh," I said, not knowing what else to say. "Oh, he does, does he?"

"*Oui*, and, of course, *Monsieur*, I always escape *zem*."

"Well, that's nice," I answered. "That's very nice. But I don't think there'll be any police for a while yet, *Pierre*."

He looked hurt and slightly disappointed.

"But *Monsieur*, I 'ave stolen *so* much!"

"Nevertheless," I said firmly, "there won't be any police for a while yet. Get Snipe to surround you, if you really feel the need for such a thing."

"Snipe," there was open disgust in Pierre's voice, "pah! Eet is to laugh. He can do nozing. I, *Pierre*, the personable Parisian, am a super-crook!"

With that he turned and panthered out of the room, tail feathers rustling like a peacock's. I watched him leave, while at the back of my brain another thought was plucking. It was becoming plain that upon the slim shoulders of Pierre, the personable Parisian, rested the cause, effect and solution of this problem. But I wasn't able to get it straight. Not then.

TERRY was still slumped mournfully on the couch, so I turned on the radio, for want of something better to do. Listening to the radio had often been a great help in twisting out plot snarls. I lighted another cigarette and tried to think.

It was obvious that we couldn't just

sit around waiting for something to happen. If we did so, the cops would pour in on us so fast that we'd be out of luck entirely. Action was necessary, immediate action. But what kind? And how?

Here was a mess proper. A fortune in jewels lying around the house, a super thief getting restless because of inactivity. A damned fool society sleuth beginning to get the urge to turn us all in to the forces of law and order, and a drunken female fence who had some bright ideas of turning over a neat bit of profit on the stolen stuff just as soon as she could contact a dishonest jeweler.

For figments of an author's imagination, these characters were certainly causing enough trouble. They could be controlled on the typewriter, but it was too late for that now. During the time when they'd done all their mischief, Titwillow had been drunk, and they'd run riot. Now what good would controlling them do?

So far, it had done nothing but postpone the inevitable. I found myself wishing again that Titwillow would let me kill them all and be done with it. Many an editor had been less squeamish about the bumping off of characters. They never seemed to mind, why should he?

But he did, and this line of reasoning was getting me nowhere in a great hurry.

It occurred to me, then, that the biggest problem at the moment was the loot. It was in the apartment, and would serve as impossibly damning evidence, should anyone trace the three characters.

"Terry," I gave him a shake, and he looked up at me from his brooding. "Show me where the jewels are."

He shook his head.

"It's no use, Danny, no use. You'd

better leave. I've resigned myself to my fate. I've been thinking it all over, fellow. There's nothing to do but call the police and have it done with."

Titwillow, it was suddenly apparent, had finked out at last. Given the thing up. Broken under the strain. I couldn't let this happen. I was determined by now that we'd see it through. How, I didn't know. But somehow.

"Look," I said, "snap out of it, man. There's some way of getting out of this. You got me up here. I agreed to see it through. I'm in it now, up to my neck. The least you can do is stand by!"

He sighed, a deep long, tremulous sigh. Then he rose.

"Okay, Danny," he said without too much enthusiasm, "I won't quit. Come with me and I'll show you the loot."

"IT'S in the study," he said a moment later, as we stood before the closed door of his den. From inside, voices speaking hotly drifted out to us. One was thickly accented, Pierre's, and the other was that of Snodbury Snipe.

"All they do is wrangle about their relative supremacy," Terry explained. "Been at it for hours."

He opened the door and we entered. Pierre and Snipe, who faced each other in two easy chairs, subsided into silent glaring, paying not the slightest attention to Terry or me.

"It should be over here, in Pierre's briefcase," Terry observed, walking to a table and picking up a leather portfolio.

"What is it *Monsieur* seeks?" asked Pierre, looking up suddenly.

"The loot you lifted," I snapped at him. "Where is it?"

Pierre looked at Snodbury Snipe, and the suave playboy sleuth grinned. Something unspoken passed between them. I could hear Terry, at the table,

exclaim in surprise.

"It's not here," he gasped hoarsely.

"Where is it, Pierre?" I demanded. "Have you hidden it under a rug?"

Pierre shrugged, while Titwillow's soft moaning again filled the air. I turned to Snodbury Snipe.

"Okay, super-sleuth, what's happened to the swag?"

Snipe studied his well-manicured nails, an irritating characteristic Titwillow had given him four novels ago, then spoke languidly.

"Really, old boy, I believe Lady Ashington has them."

"Lady Ashington!" Terry was beside me, glaring down at Snipe. "Where is the old she-fool?"

"She 'as fled zee coop, *phfffft!*" Pierre declared.

"Gone?" I bleated, "you mean she's gone?"

"*Precisement*," observed Pierre with relish. "Now maybe the *gendarmes* will surround me, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Oh God," Terrence groaned huskily. "Oh God, that drunken old fool is probably out on the street at this very moment trying to peddle the jewels and the Coanor diamond!"

CHAPTER V

Where Is Lady Ashington?

"THIS is the end," Titwillow was moaning over and over again. "The cops are going to pick her up trying to get rid of those jewels." He shuddered. "Then they'll trace it to here, and what will become of me? Leave, Danny. Leave while you have a chance."

"Nuts," I snapped. "I started to unravel this thing and I'm at least going to have a try at it. Buck up. We've got to stop Lady Ashington before the police do. So get your coat on and

bring that typewriter along. We might need it. Thank goodness all the jewelry stores are closed. We may have a fighting chance."

Titwillow hesitated, bewildered by my sudden surge of action.

"Get a move on," I barked. "Grab your coat and the typewriter."

"But my pajamas," he gasped, "I'll have to cha—"

"Change them hell," I rasped. "Throw an overcoat on and no one will know the difference. We haven't too much time."

Pierre and Snodbury were watching me with visible bewilderment.

I turned on them.

"You two got coats?"

They nodded in unison.

"Good. Get 'em on. We're going places."

Pierre flushed.

"But, Monsieur, I cannot leave. I must wait for zee gendarmes. They will surround ze apartment shortly—"

"Get your coat," I ordered, and the tone of my voice was more forceful than a typewriter order would have been. Titwillow had left the room in search of his coat, and I could hear him in the living room packing the typewriter.

In a moment later, Pierre stood beside me in an Inverness cape and a slouch hat. Snodbury Snipe had donned his topper and a Chesterfield plus white gloves and muffler. They looked like the last scene in a crime movie.

I steered them out into the living room, where Titwillow, overcoat over his pajamas, typewriter in his hand, was waiting bewilderedly, yet hopefully, for us.

"Okay, children," I ordered. "Now let's get out of here!" I grabbed my own coat and hat as we marched through the hall and out of the door. We stepped into the self-running elevator and pressed the button.

On the way down in the elevator no one said a word. We must have been one of the oddest assortments imaginable. A harassed, plump little bald man, wearing an overcoat over his pajamas and clutching a typewriter and sheafs of paper; a leering, sleek and suave, wax-moustached Frenchman, dressed in a cape and slouch hat; an incredibly well-groomed young man about town, wearing top hat, white tie; and yours truly.

We were some collection.

"Okay, kiddies," I said, as the elevator stopped at the lobby. "Let's get organized. We haven't any time to lose." I turned to Terry. "Get your car, it's bigger, faster than mine—and incidentally a helluva lot more comfortable."

"But Danny, what's this—"

"Never mind," I broke in. "Get your car. You'll find out later."

HE hesitated, looking down at his plump pajama-clad shanks peeping from beneath his overcoat. Then he gritted his teeth and moved across the lobby of the apartment building. I watched him step out of the door that led to the garage, then turned to Snodbury Snipe and Pierre.

"Did the old bat say anything about where she intended to go?" I asked.

"You mean Lady Ashington, of course," Snipe observed.

"That's right. She must have had something in mind when she packed out with the loot. Did she say anything?" I insisted.

"Non," Pierre put his two cents in, "ze Lady Ashington she ees too damn drunk to say anything."

I heard a horn toot out in the driveway, so I steered my two charges out through the lobby door, where Terrence Titwillow was waiting in his long black limousine. I shoved in beside him.

"Get around on the other side," I ordered. "I'll drive. You're gonna be plenty busy with that typewriter."

He got out and came around to the other side, while I slipped behind the wheel. Our two figmentary chums were still standing nonchalantly beside the car, had made no effort to get in.

"You two," I ordered, "pile in, pronto."

They made no move.

"I say, old bean," Snipe said, "don't think we'll go with you. Things to do. Thanks just the same."

I looked at Titwillow.

"Order them in," I demanded.

He slid the cover off his typewriter and twisted a sheet of paper into the roller. With the machine on his lap, he then clacked off a brief sentence. I smiled in satisfaction as Snodbury Snipe and Pierre climbed into the rear of the car without another word.

Then I threw the car into gear, and in another moment we were barrelling wildly down Michigan Boulevard, headed for the Loop. The clock on the dash board set the time as shortly after midnight. That was just as well, for there wouldn't be any jewelry stores open. I was gambling on Lady Ashington's desire to peddle the stuff to the more well established gem houses, as she had done previously. Which would mean that we'd probably catch up with her somewhere in the Loop.

At Randolph and Michigan, we veered sharply to the right and roared under the "L" structure going west toward the center of the Loop. We'd take a look at State Street, first, I reasoned.

"Danny," Terry had gripped my arm, "slow down, Danny! Can't you hear the sirens?"

I let up a bit on the accelerator. He was right. I must have been deaf, for sirens were wailing wildly behind us,

and a spot threw its flash on the rear of our limousine, its glare blinding me in the rear vision mirror.

"Damn," I moaned, "if we're pinched for speeding, we *will* be out of luck!" "*Voilà!*" exclaimed Pierre, who had been holding his tongue up until now. "*Voilà! Eet is ze gendarmes* come to surround me! I am so 'appy I could shed tears."

I ignored his wishful thinking, and slowed perceptibly, drawing close to the curb. The siren screamed louder, the spot flashed ahead of us, and to my utter amazement two squad cars raced *past* us, cutting sharply to the left at the corner of State Street!

"WHEEEEW," I gasped. "Close call. Evidently they didn't want us." Then the moan of sirens dashing across the other side of the Loop came wailing to our ears.

"Lord, Danny," Terry exclaimed, "something must be popping. Hear those sirens? There must be over a dozen cars racing through the Loop!"

"Yeah," I said, "yeah. But we've got to find Lady Ashington. We haven't any time for problems that aren't re—" I stopped short, as a horrible premonition burst loose beneath my thinking cap.

"Omigawd!" I cried, "those sirens might be, could be, more than likely *are*, for Lady Ashington!"

"*Voilà!*" exulted Pierre, "*ze gendarmes* are hot on *ze* scent!"

"Could have solved the crime long ago," Snodbury Snipe grouched, "if they'd asked *me* in on the case!"

I looked sharply at Terry, who's face had gone deathly white. But he didn't say a word. Smashing my foot down on the accelerator again, I swung the car out from the curb and shot the block from Wabash to State Street in less than a hair-split-second.

"We're going to follow those cars!" I gritted. "And I hope to Jeudas that we won't find what I think we're going to find."

Three seconds later we were wheeling down State, and in less than a minute I'd jammed on the brakes. The squad cars, close to eight of them so far, were massed in front of a State Street jewelry store!

Sirens still moaned, indicating the approach of other squads. People had already filled the streets, stopping traffic, and above the tumult could be heard a throaty basso, somehow feminine, bellowing an entirely indecent *ballade d'amour*. Lady Ashington!

"Ohhhhhhhh," Titwillow's gasp was soft, like that of a man who sees the last straw bobbing away on a wave.

"Come on," I blurted, opening the door of the car, "let's find out what is happening!"

I was out in the street, waiting for him to come puffing around to where I stood. Snipe had stepped out beside me, and Pierre, too, had piled out.

We were right at the fringes of the crowd, and it was immediately apparent that we'd have to do a lot of elbowing to force our way through to the circle of activity in front of the jewelry store.

"*Zis is magnifque!*" breathed Pierre, showing his white teeth in a flashing smirk beneath his waxed moustache. "*Voilà! I meet ze police,*" he fished into his pocket, "with *zis!*"

I looked at what Pierre had drawn forth, and gasped. He held a shining, keen-edged knife in his hand!

Terry was with us now, and he paled. "Jeeeeudas, Danny," he breathed, "make him put that away. I taught him how to use it too well!"

There was no time for quibbling. No time for typewritten commands. Pierre wanted to meet the cops in combat, had waited eagerly for it. That was enough

for us. We most certainly did not want Pierre to meet them. Not right now, anyway. I swung, efficiently, if I do say so.

Pierre went out like the Lindbergh Beacon, toppling face forward to the pavement. The knife slid along the pavement to a gutter. Terry and I bent simultaneously and picked him up like a sack of wheat. In another few moments—with the aid of my necktie and several belts—he was temporarily out of the picture, trussed up neatly in the back of the car.

THEN we were shoving through the crowd, elbowing, thrusting, until we were near the center of excitement.

A Black Maria rolled clanging up to the scene, while cops, swinging nightsticks expertly, paved a path for it through the crowd. Terry and I were forced to retreat about ten yards to get out of the range of those nightsticks.

And all this time the bellowing voice of Lady Ashington could be heard singing lustily above the uproar. Finally, the crowd parted enough to give us a view of the proceedings.

I had to clutch Terry by the arm to keep him from falling over in a dead faint at what he saw. There were two horses on the scene, the first being the disarranged and bellowing Lady Ashington, and the second being an actual animal of that species, looking as though it might have been stolen from a milk truck!

Lady Ashington, still in control of the situation, was astride the milk horse!

In her hand, swinging unerringly, about at the heads of the sweating policemen who were trying to drag her down, was the case carrying the stolen jewelry, including the Coanor Diamond! A second glance revealed that the dowager had evidently tried to ride the terrified animal through the plate

glass window of the jewelry store. For the window was utterly shattered, and the milk horse was rearing majestically about in fragments of splintered glass.

"Danny," Terry moaned. "Do you see her?"

"See her? How can I help it!"

"What are we going to do, Danny?" he bleated.

The cops were finally, through the strength of sheer numbers, winning in the battle against horse and dowager. Lady Ashington was slipping from the back of her mount. I could see that it would be just a matter of moments before they had her in the paddy wagon.

"There's only one thing to do," I answered, grabbing him by the arm and turning him back toward the car. "That's get out of here!"

We turned, then, and pushed as rapidly as we could away from the scene. A voice, shrilling excitedly in our ears, told us that it hadn't been too soon.

"They've got her," screamed the voice excitedly, "and now they're tossing her into the wagon!"

"And they'll find the jewels the minute they open the case," moaned Terry.

Finally, it must have been fully three minutes later, we were back at the side of the car. A quick inspection told us that Pierre was still out as cold as yesterday's gravy in the back of the limousine.

"Climb in," I ordered. "Everything has been shot to hell. We've got to put some distance between ourselves and the gentlemen of the law. Give us time to figure out another angle—that is, if there are any angles left to this mess!"

I was in the car and Terry was beside me when he grabbed my arm frantically. "Danny! Where's Snodbury Snipe?"

In the excitement we had forgotten

our society sleuth!

"Lord, I thought he was beside us all that time!"

I jumped out of the car and dove into the crowd again, Terry right on my heels. One thing was certain. Things were bad, terrible, but they would be plenty worse if Snipe got loose among the coppers!

Three minutes later one fact was obvious. No Snodbury Snipe! My stomach was turning cartwheels and my neck was turned into Niagara in miniature, what with the perspiration rolling down my collar. It was hard to believe that five minutes before had seemed like the climax to our misery.

I grabbed one of the bystanders. I recognized him as having been up at the front of the trouble when Snipe was with us.

"Where did the fellow who was with us a moment ago disappear to?" I demanded. The look in his eyes told me he didn't get it.

"Huh?"

"A chap with a top hat, dressed formally, y' know. Remember seeing him?" I was shaking the hapless sap, now.

"Yeah, mister. He was with youse two."

"Where did he go?" I repeated.

"Why," the bystander looked at me as though I was loony, "he went over there," he pointed toward the line of squad cars. Then his eyes lighted. "See," he bleated. "There he is, now. Just getting into one of them squad cars with the cops!"

I turned, while my heart tried to kick its way through the soles of my shoes. Turned, and saw the tailcoat of Snodbury Snipe vanishing into a squad car!

"Terry," I screeched. "Look!"

But I might as well have saved my lungs. For Terrence Titwillow had seen, and keeled over in a faint!

CHAPTER VI

The Stranger Again

THE respiration work necessary to revive Terrence Titwillow took a little better than five minutes, during which time the Black Maria bounced majestically away carrying Lady Ashington and followed by a squad car detail in which Snodbury Snipe was riding.

The remaining coppers dispersed the crowd as rapidly as they could, and just before several bluecoats were about to descend on Terry and me, I brought him around and helped him into the car.

"Tell me," Terry begged, as I was starting the car, "tell me that this is all a ghastly nightmare, Danny!"

"Do you have to be told?" I snapped, for by now I was growing more than a trifle irritated. "Why," I demanded as an afterthought, "couldn't you have been a writer for the kiddy magazines? Or a scribe for a religious journal? The next time you create characters, my fat chum, please create decent, normal, god-fearing ones."

"I'm sorry Danny. I guess I've dragged you into a pretty devilish mess. You can step out if you want to."

"Step out?" Now I *was* burned. "Step out?" I repeated. "After all I've had to go through in the last few hours? Don't be funny. I'm going to see this thing through if it lands us all in Alcatraz!"

"Thanks, Danny," Terry mumbled humbly. "I won't forget all you've done."

I didn't answer, just threw the car into gear and shot ahead along State, going south. Moans from the back of the car indicated that Pierre was coming out of the fog.

"Where are we going, Danny?" he asked.

I had been doing some fast and furious weighing of problems during the past five or ten minutes, and now I had another angle.

"Look," I told him. "The situation is about like this. The police have Lady Ashington and the swag. Our pal Snodbury Snipe has followed them to the lockup to put in his two cents' worth. Between Snipe's amateur efforts to make a name for himself as a Sherlock, and the damning evidence of the Coanor Diamond and those other expensive trifles, we haven't a chance in the world. Right?"

"Right."

"Okay. We're in a hot spot no matter what happens. There's just one chance in a hundred of getting through this thing."

"What's that?" Terry hissed hopelessly.

"If we follow them to the station," I speculated aloud, "we might have a chance of shutting up Ashington or Snipe, or both, before they spill the soy beans."

"But how'll we get near them? Surely the police are going to be grilling Lady Ashington the moment they find the loot in that bag."

"Once upon a time," I answered, "I used to work for a living. As a police reporter. Remember?"

Terry nodded.

"I spent most of my time around the Central Bureau, at 11th and State. That's where they're rushing Lady Ashington. I know a number of the coppers there. The Desk Sergeant owes me a favor. I hushed a nasty little mess for him at one time. We can get into the grilling easily enough," I answered.

"*Mon Dieu!*" The exclamation came to us from the back seat, indicating that Pierre had finally come around.

"What are we going to do about him?" Terry asked in a shaky voice.

"Take me to ze peeg police!" demanded our charge venomously. "I 'ave a zing or two to settle with zem!"

"Shut up!" I snapped at Pierre over my shoulder. Then to Terry. "We can stop at a pawn shop a few blocks down. I've a chum who will sell me a pair of bracelets. We can snap them on the frenzied Frenchy just to make sure he doesn't follow us into the midst of the coppers."

THREE minutes later I was climbing into the car once more, a nice set of handcuffs stuffed in my side pocket. Three minutes more and we pulled up in front of the Central Bureau, at 11th and State.

I was just starting to clamber out of the car when a smooth, suavely familiar voice purred in my ear:

"Pleeze, do not move, *mon vieux*."

This was the last straw. I turned slowly and looked into Pierre's beaming black eyes and smiling face. In his hand he held nonchalantly, a small pearl handled revolver.

"You got loose," I said stupidly.

"But certainly," Pierre beamed good-naturedly. "Am I not Pierre? Am I not ze supreme, ze invincible, ze masterful crook of crooks?"

"You am," I said disgustedly.

Terrence Titwillow was staring at his brain child in undisguised dismay.

"I forgot," he stammered, "about the revolver. I put in a special holster in his sleeve in my last book."

"Dandy time to remember that," I said sourly.

"Pleeze," Pierre held up a slim hand in admonition, "we must not quarrel. Geeve me ze handcuffs pleeze."

"What for?" I asked stubbornly.

Pierre wagged a finger playfully.

"You shall see." He motioned with the revolver. "Pleeze, ze handcuffs."

There wasn't anything I could do. I

passed them over to him. Then, to Titwillow's and my intense humiliation, he wound our arms through the spokes of the steering wheel and cuffed them together at the wrists. We were definitely going to sit that one out together.

Pierre stepped from the car and bowed gracefully to us.

"Since ze stupid gendarmes weel not surround Pierre, *voilà!* Pierré he surround zem."

He turned then with another suave bow and slung his Inverness cape about his shoulders. Pulling his black slouch hat low over his eyes he slunk up the steps of the precinct station and disappeared behind its massive iron doors.

"That does it," I said despairingly, "with your three looney characters running at the mouth to John Law, your goose is cooked. They'll be at your apartment for you inside of a half hour. They'll probably hold me as an accessory after the fact."

"I shouldn't have got you into this," Terrence groaned. "It was my problem. I had no right to mix anybody else up with it. This damnable typewriter and that screwy salesman are my worry. I should have kept it that way."

As he spoke something popped in my brain. It wasn't an idea or a definite plan of action. It was one of those wild unbelievable, screwy hunches that afflict the best of us.

Titwillow's terrible typewriter was between Terrence and me on the seat. I twisted it around until the keyboard faced Terrence. He was looking at me in slight bewilderment.

"Write," I commanded him, "write every blessed thing you can remember about that crazy typewriter salesman. Don't miss a thing. His tortoise shell glasses, his sad smile, how his voice sounded, everything. And hurry!"

"But Danny," Terrence protested

weakly, "I don't see—"

"Write!" I almost shouted the word. "Forget about what you can or can't see."

SULKILY, muttering under his breath, Terrence complied with my wild request. To tell the truth, as, I listened to the keys clattering under the nimble fingers of his free hand, I had serious doubts myself as to just what I was trying to do or prove.

Terrence typed for five or six minutes while I sat there stewing helplessly. Inside the Central Bureau, Pierre and Snipe and Lady Ashington were sealing our doom. But if my half-formed, incredibly wild idea worked we might have a chance, a bare thousand-to-one chance.

Terrence had stopped typing.

"I can't think of another thing," he said. "I've got it all here. I've got him on paper to the best of my memory."

I realize then, with a hopeless sinking feeling, that my vague plan had been unimaginably preposterous.

"What was the idea behind that brain storm, Danny," Terrence asked rather suspiciously.

"What difference does it make," I answered gloomily. "It was just one of those crazy impossible ideas that—"

I broke off abruptly, every muscle suddenly tensing.

For behind us in the back seat, *a discreet cough* had sounded!

For an instant I was too stunned to act and then I wheeled about in the seat as fast as my fettered condition would allow. Terrence Titwillow turned almost simultaneously with yours truly.

My eyes bugged out about a full inch at the sight they beheld and for a terrible instant my heart stopped altogether.

For sitting calmly in the back seat of Terrence Titwillow's limousine, was

a tall gaunt stranger, dressed completely in black and wearing tortoise shell glasses over the bridge of his nose.

Terrence's strangled cry split the shocked silence.

"*You!*" he cried hysterically. "How did you get here?"

"My hunch was right," I crowed jubilantly. "You brought him here, Terrence. Or rather the typewriter did. That was my idea. That typewriter, by some fantastic process, which I don't even pretend to understand, materializes anyone it writes about. So here we have the guy that got you into the mess in the first place. If anybody can get us out, it's he."

"That sounds logical," Terrence said breathlessly, hardly daring to begin to hope. "He's the boy who's going to straighten this mess out."

"I refuse," the black-clad creature said in a hollow voice. "Get out of this mess yourself. I refuse to assist you in the least."

"Now be reasonable," Terrence said tearfully. "I'm in a terrible jam. You've got to help me. You're the only one that can."

The tall man shook his head with finality.

"I refuse."

"Is that so?" I snapped. "Well maybe I can change your mind."

I was getting desperate, and another wild idea had just popped into my head. I should be able to control this black-clad stranger on the typewriter, just as I had been able to control Snodbury Snipe and the others. It was reasonable and if I could—

I swung the typewriter in front of me, wriggled one free hand to the keyboard.

"Is that your last word?" I asked him.

"Absolutely," he answered with emphasis.

I TYPED one sentence as rapidly as I could. Before I finished there was a wild yell from the back seat. I peered quickly in the direction of the terror-torn scream and my hopes began to rise. For the inscrutable typewriter salesman was crouched in a corner of the seat—as naked as the day he was born.

"Look Terry," I yelled, "I can control His Nibs with the greatest of ease. The sentence I wrote just described him without any clothes and presto! *Voilà!* as Pierre would say. It is done."

"W-what good will that do?" Terrence asked bewilderedly.

"Give me back my clothes," our tortoise-shelled chum cried unhappily. "I—I feel cold."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," I told him sternly. "We're in front of the police station right now and I'm going to send you in there. I'm going to send you into the policewomen's washroom—just as you are. After you've spent a few minutes with the ladies of the law you'll be glad enough to come back here and be a little more co-operative."

I started to type again but before I had clacked out three letters a frantic hand gripped my shoulder, spun me around.

"No, no," our naked nemesis gasped in terror, "you—you wouldn't do that."

I started to type again.

"*Wait!*" he shrieked. "Stop. I'll help you. S-stop typing, please."

I stopped, but I kept my fingers on the keys.

"I'll give you five seconds. At the end of that time—in you go."

"All right, all right," he gasped. "Do as I say. Type down the names of those people who were animated by the machine."

"You mean Pierre, Lady Ashington and Snipe?" I asked.

I didn't wait for his pendulous head

to bob on his long neck. I went ahead and typed out the names.

"What now?" I asked.

Skin-and-bones didn't answer. He leaned over the back of the front seat and with his forefinger he poked one key of the typewriter so fast that it sounded like a miniature machine gun banging against the paper.

I peered down at the paper in the machine and saw that our chum had merely typed diagonals through the three names, as follows:

~~Left/Right/Top~~
~~Bottom/Left/Right~~
~~Left/Right/Bottom/Top/Left/Right~~

For a minute I couldn't speak. I was completely stunned with the magnificent simplicity of his solution.

"You mean, you mean," I gasped, like a double-talking radio comedian, "that that's all there is to it?"

"All?" he echoed in an injured tone, "isn't that enough?"

"What's it all about, Danny?" Terrence Titwillow said dazedly. "I feel like I came in in the middle of the picture."

I held up my hand.

"Listen!" From the top of the Central police building a banshee siren had started to moan through the darkness and silence.

"What's that for?" Terrence asked uneasily.

"Escaped prisoner," I told him happily.

At that instant the heavy doors of the Bureau building burst open and a dozen or so blue-uniformed officers streamed out. One of them, conspicuous by a dash of gold on his sleeve, hurried to the side of our car.

"See anybody come out here?" he demanded. "See anything of two screwy looking guys and a screwier looking dame?"

"I shook my head.

"Nope officer, didn't see a soul. Why? Somebody get away?"

"You might as well know," he said bitterly, "the reporters have got the story by now. That woman we found with the Coanor Diamond got away. Disappeared without a trace. So did that young fellow in the dress suit who was helping the D.A. question her. On top of that a nutty Frenchman disappeared from a padded cell in the basement. He was wearing a straightjacket at the time, so it must've been an inside job. I'm telling you though, we won't quit looking till we find 'em."

"Good hunting," I said.

When he had gone, Terrence began to sob with relief. His fat shoulders shook spasmodically.

"We're out of the woods, Danny," he cried, almost hysterically. "We're safe. They've gone, gone, gone."

"Can I have my clothes now?" It was the somewhat plaintive voice of our thin-shanked deliverer.

I turned and looked at him.

"I don't seem to remember your name," I said.

"Oh," he answered, "it's Dr. Erasmus. I am a scientist. I constructed that typewriter based on my fourth dimensional experiments and I needed a writer who created fictional characters to give it a test. That is why I chose Mr. Titwillow."

"How about his fictional characters?" I asked him. "Pierre and the rest, I mean. Are they blanked out for good?"

"Until Mr. Titwillow writes more of their adventures on my machine, they are as those not born," Dr. Erasmus said coldly. "Now—my clothes, if you please."

Terrence had been picking at the typewriter, while I was talking to the Doctor and when he stopped I looked

at him. There was a funny, complacent expression on his face, like a cat let loose in a bird store.

I turned again and stared. The backseat was empty. Dr. Erasmus was very much gone. A horrible suspicion came to me and I grabbed the sheet of paper from the typewriter and stared at the last sentence. Or last words I should say, which read simply:

~~Dr. Erasmus~~

Then, before I could stop him, Terrence Titwillow hurled the typewriter from the window, into the path of a rumbling ten-ton truck which reduced it to a tangled mass of splintered wreck-

age.

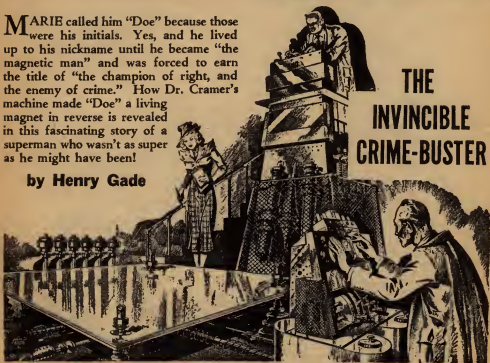
"And that," he said, in a tired, but triumphant, voice, "is that!"

That was just about all there was to it. Terrence and I managed to get uncuffed and we haven't seen each other since that unforgettable night. His publishers announced that his next book would be delayed somewhat because Mr. Titwillow was doing all his work in long hand now.

As a sort of last line I might tack on a public apology to that typewriter salesman I threw down the steps the other day. I'm still a little jittery I guess.

MARIE called him "Doe" because those were his initials. Yes, and he lived up to his nickname until he became "the magnetic man" and was forced to earn the title of "the champion of right, and the enemy of crime." How Dr. Cramer's machine made "Doe" a living magnet in reverse is revealed in this fascinating story of a superman who wasn't as super as he might have been!

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BIG JULY ISSUE

**AMAZING
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Robots

by **ROBERT
LESLIE BELLEM**

"**G**OOD God—!" the words burst bomblike from Tim Kermit's taut throat. "Sylvia!"

Sylvia Gaynor didn't answer. She would never answer again. She lay on the cloth-of-gold couch, her eyes closed, her hair a stilled storm of ebony, an enigmatic smile on her lips. To Tim Kermit that smile was vaguely mocking, almost like a taunt; for Sylvia had been murdered—

And the police were accusing him of the crime!

The injustice of it filled him with savage anger. An hour ago they had arrested him at the televideo studio without even granting him time to leave a note for Dutton, his boss. That was bad enough, since it might adversely affect the promotion he'd been

There was one thing about robot slaves; they couldn't tell a lie—yet this one did, and put Tim Kermit in a murder cell

Can't Lie



A ray gun flared from the open door, directly at the robot.

promised; but this present ordeal was worse.

Hotly he turned on the homicide sergeant to whose wrist he was manacled. "You've no right to bring me here to her home and make me look at her . . . like this!" And he tried to keep his gaze off the ugly Q-ray wound that marred the white perfection of Sylvia's breast.

But the detective stolidly jockeyed him around so that he was again forced to stare at the corpse.

"Why shouldn't you look at her, pal? You were in love with her, weren't you?"

"Once, maybe," Kermit admitted. "Not any more."

"How do you mean that?"

Kermit said: "I was like a lot of others at National Telecasting when she was a star there. Her beauty had most of us in a dream."

"Well?"

"Later we woke up," Kermit made a grim mouth around this.

"What caused the so-called awakening, pal?"

Kermit said: "She married a man with money," and flashed a glance of contempt across the room at Geoffrey Gaynor.

Gaynor, beef-jowled and swollen with the arrogance of the wealthy, gave Kermit a frosty smile.

"You think it was my money that won Sylvia?"

"I'm sure of it."

The fat man's smile winked off.

"Maybe you're right. She *was* a gold digger; I found that out. All the same, she jilted you and married me. That's why you murdered her."

Rage festered up into Kermit's gullet. He shouted: "I tell you I didn't—"

"Keep your voice down, pal," the homicide sergeant let the advice drip out of a corner of his mouth. "Yells

won't buy you anything. Why don't you come clean?"

"I haven't got anything to come clean about! Why should I kill Sylvia? What would be my motive?"

"Jealousy," Geoffrey Gaynor again thrust in his verbal oar. "Because she tossed you over."

Kermit pivoted and felt suddenly as an abattoir animal must feel while awaiting the slaughterer's Q-bolt.*

"Damn you, are you deliberately trying to put me in the lethal ray chamber?"

"Precisely," the older man's answer cut like a winter wind. And his malevolent expression started a shudder inching down Tim Kermit's spine.

THAT shudder was spawned of fear, Kermit secretly admitted. He was no coward, but he was scared. You couldn't combat a thing like this with ordinary courage; couldn't fight the charges with your bare fists. Not when they'd been made by a man of Geoffrey Gaynor's importance. Gaynor was president of General Robots, Inc. What chance had a minor telecast executive against that kind of enemy?

He must keep calm, the accused man told himself. As soon as possible he must contact Dutton, his boss at the televideo station, and arrange for a lawyer. He looked around the room, first at Sylvia's corpse and then at the fragments of a smashed Gaynor household robot in a far corner, its mechanism wrecked by a tubular steel chair

* Q-bolt—the emanation of a radium gun. An isotope of radium, radium-Q, discovered by Le-Temps, in 1987, disintegrates, under propitious circumstances, nearly 10,000 times faster than ordinary radium. Thus, it is possible to use it in the form of a ray which causes radium burns at such an enormous rate that the result is an explosion of the flesh cells. A person hit with a Q-bolt is not very nice to look at since the flesh struck by the bolt is severely disrupted and burned.—Ed.

that somebody had used as a sledge-hammer. Then he spoke quietly to the homicide sergeant.

"Even a millionaire's unsupported word isn't enough to convict a man of murder. You'll need more than that."

"We've got more than that, pal."

"Meaning what?"

"It's a surprise. Even the newscasters don't know about it yet. A servant robot."

"That thing?" Kermit indicated the ruined electro-automaton in the corner.

"Nah, pal. That's just the one you busted when you realized it had seen you killing Mrs. Gaynor. You knew its testimony would convict you, so you wrecked it to keep it from talking."

Kermit forgot to stay calm.

"For God's sake quit calling me a murderer! If you think you've got proof of my guilt, drag it out and let's have it!"

"Sure, pal. Keep your tunic on. First let me ask you something. Do you agree it's mechanically impossible for a robot to tell a lie?"

The question puzzled Kermit. That was almost kindergarten stuff. Everybody knew that an electro-automaton was incapable of anything but the truth, undeviating and inflexible.* It

* Camera-like, the Gaynor robot viso lenses record all events and actions which might transpire within their focus; but instead of registering the scenes upon impermanent cellulastic cinema film, all impressions are electrically conducted through a series of selenium converter-cells to the central magnetic braincoils.

There the impulses are sorted and chronologically filed on the robot's memory discs, from which at any future time a playback can be obtained. By virtue of a complicated process called magneto-synthesis, this playback is audible rather than visual; that is, the automaton's electrovox describes the selected scene verbally down to its minutest detail.

Obviously, because of the tamper-proof nature of the mechanism, it is impossible for the slightest inaccuracy to slip into a playback. In brief, a robot simply can not lie. It records whatever it "sees" and repeats whatever it records.—Ed.

was the way they were constructed.

Kermit warily met the homicide detective's gaze.

"Of course a robot tells the truth. So what?"

"You'll see, pal," the headquarters man growled. He tugged Kermit to a closet; opened it. "Take a look at what's going to put you in the ray chamber." And he gestured to an ordinary Gaynor robot servant, a current model.

A whirring hum emanated from the automaton's motivity center, indicating that it was in functional condition. Its polished viso lenses surveyed Kermit for a dispassionate instant; then, ominously, it leveled an accusing metal finger at him and said: "*You are the man.*"

KERMIT felt his scalp tightening and sweat forming in his palms.

"What in hell's name—?" he gasped.

Again the automaton's electrovox dinned at him like some fantastic nightmare.

"*You smashed the other robot, then blasted my lady's body with a Q-gun. You are the man.*" And as this doom-droning mechanical monologue continued, a picture leaped into Kermit's imagination; a picture as fully staged as any production he had ever helped Dutton, his boss, to direct at the television theater . . .

. . . He saw himself on trial for his life, saw this metallic monster in the witness box, its perjured testimony accepted as truth because it was axiomatic that an automaton could not tell a lie . . .

"But this one's lying!" Kermit belatedly as he brushed away the ugly vision and whirled on Geoffrey Gaynor. "And somehow I think you're responsible, damn you! You manufacture these robots and you probably know

some secret way to alter their brain-coils. It's a scheme to frame me for a murder I didn't commit!"

The millionaire's mouth thinned.

"You'll never evade punishment with that ridiculous theory, my friend. Nobody on earth can alter a robot's memory discs."

Frustrated, rage-lashed, Tim Kermit turned back to the homicide sergeant.

"Take me out of here before I go off my chump! And for God's sake do me a favor!"

"Name it, pal. I'll let you know."

"Get in touch with my boss at the studio," Kermit pleaded. "His name is Dutton. Tell him to hire a lawyer—"

"By this time they were outside the mansion of murder. And the sergeant's favors proved unrequired, after all. Someone came sprinting across the street from a parked electroglider; a tall well-dressed man whose mobile features revealed deep concern.

"Tim! Tim Kermit!" He called.

"Mr. Dutton!" Kermit answered as he felt a surge of relief and gratitude leaping through him like a warm tidal wave. Here at last was someone he could depend on, this man who was his superior at the telecasting station. Now he need no longer feel so friendless in the face of Geoffrey Gaynor's enmity.

He was aware of Dutton studying him.

"They told me you had been arrested, Tim. I came right away. Is it true that—"

"No!" the younger man answered through clenched teeth. "I didn't kill Sylvia Gaynor, if that's what you're asking me."

"But what about the robot's testimony?" Dutton said. "You had better shoot straight, Tim. For Loreen's sake."

That was Loreen Lane he was talking about; his private secretary—and Tim Kermit's fiancée, if Tim ever summoned up enough nerve to pop the question. Just thinking about her made Kermit almost forget the depth of his present jeopardy.

He said: "Loreen doesn't think I'm guilty, does she?"

"She's waiting to find out. So am I, Tim."

"I've already told you," Kermit said. "In spite of that robot's story, I didn't murder Sylvia Gaynor. But I think I know who did."

"Who?"

Kermit started to answer, but the homicide detective tugged at his handcuff; interrupted him.

"No use accusing Geoffrey Gaynor again, pal. You can't make it stick. Come along, we got to be goin'." And he bundled his prisoner into a squadglider; opened the propulsion tubes.

IT was evening when Loreen Lane came to see Kermit down at headquarters. A turnkey escorted her to the cell, grumbling.

"Visitor for you, buddy." And then Loreen herself was wailing.

"Tim! Oh-h-h, Tim, darling!"

Kermit seized her hands through the vanadasteel bars. Her nearness, her fresh young bloneness, filled his veins with the wine of elation.

"Then you got my message, sweet?"

"Y-yes, Tim. I hurried here as soon as I heard from you."

He smiled wryly.

"Thank you, beloved. It shows you believe in me."

"I do believe in you, Tim! But—but I don't understand why you had that note smuggled to me asking me to bring a powercar outside the jail—"

Sharp anxiety knifed into his lowered voice.

"Wait a minute, Loreen. You did bring one, didn't you?"

"Y-yes."

"Good!" he breathed more easily.

"And now, with a spot of luck, we'll be on our way." Whereupon he leaned on the barred door of the cell—and his weight swung it open!

Loreen drew back in amazement.

"Tim—"

"Sh-h-h! They left it unlocked when they put me in here. So I got that message out to you and bided my time." He slid an arm about her slender waist, guided her along the deserted corridor. "The exit is this way. If nobody sees us we'll be in the clear around that next bend."

"But—but you can't do this, Tim! If you escape it'll seem like a confession of guilt!"

Subconsciously he clenched his capable fists.

"On the contrary, it'll prove my innocence . . . I hope!" Then there was a rear door directly ahead of them, unlocked, unguarded. Kermit and the girl scurried toward it, fled noiselessly into the outer night. Darkness spread a cloak of shadows around them.

At the next intersection rested Loreen's powercar, cumbersome and earthbound by comparison with more modern modes of transportation such as the swift antigrav rocket craft and the moulded plastic electrogliders. But the powercar was part of Tim Kermit's plan—because it contained luggage room abundant enough for his special purpose.

He slid into the operator's compartment with the golden-haired Loreen beside him; touched the controls that sent this outmoded but speedy vehicle scooting for the suburbs. Loreen nestled close to him, shivering.

"Tim, I'm frightened! First jail-breaking, and now excessive speed—"

"You can add burglary to the list before I'm finished," he chuckled without mirth.

"Burglary?"

He nodded while gluing his gaze to the roadway ahead. Presently he swung about, aiming for a palatial estate on his left. It loomed dark and sinister against the night's brooding background, a silent house whose recent guest had been death.

"Geoffrey Gaynor's mansion!" Loreen whispered.

Kermit braked his powercar to a halt.

"Stay here, my sweet," he said crisply. Then he strode off through the blackness.

HE was gone a long time. Ages, it seemed to the waiting girl. Even when he returned, it was only for an instant.

"Couple more trips should do it," he reassured her. Then he deposited an armload of metallic fragments in the rear luggage space and vanished again.

At long last he finished his burglari-ous mission; settled himself once more at the powercar's steering knob. Heading back toward town, he gave no thought to the possibility that Geoffrey Gaynor might be following. It never entered his mind.

"Are you game to see me through the rest of my experiment, hon?" he asked the girl at his side.

Her chin came up; she straightened her dainty shoulders. "I shan't leave you, Tim. Ever."

"Thanks, beloved." He was silent a grateful moment. Then: "What we need now is a place to work; a place where I can try to fit the pieces together."

"You m-mean you don't dare go home? The police might have look-outs there, hunting for you?"

Kermit's fingers drummed a thoughtful tattoo on the steering knob. "I have it!" he suddenly exploded. "We'll call Dutton. Dial him now on the autorad, sweetling. Hurry!"

Swiftly the girl reached for a miniature wheel on the instrument panel, a wheel perforated and marked with countless numbers and letters. This was the powercar's autorad dial with which communication could be established with any citizen from one border to the other.*

Presently, from a concealed electrovox, there came a mellowly modulated response.

"Dutton speaking."

"Th-this is Loreen Lane, Mr. Dutton. I—"

"Hello, Loreen. You sound worried. Anything wrong?"

"Y-yes . . . and no. It's about Tim. He . . . he wants . . ."

Tim Kermit reached over, took the tiny microphone from her grasp.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir. I'm out of jail and I need a place where I can conduct a certain experiment."

"They released you, Tim?"

"No, sir. I escaped."

"Good Lord!"

Kermit said rapidly: "Don't misunderstand, sir. It was my only chance to prove my innocence. To pin the killing of Sylvia Gaynor where it belongs. And I think I can do it—if I can have an hour or two of absolute seclusion."

* Each adult possesses his own individual wavelength assigned to him for life, thanks to the scientific way in which radio channels have long ago been split up into vernier segments—thousands of them being crowded into each frequency formerly allotted to a single broadcasting unit.

Whether at home or in your private conveyance, you always have some form of autorad receiver-transmitter near you. And to contact anyone else you merely look him up in the teledirectory, turn your autorad dial to the proper combination. At once your contact is established.—Ed.

"You want a place to work? Certainly, Tim. How about my garage? You're welcome to it. And if I can help—"

Tim Kermit smiled happily.

"Thanks a million, Mr. Dutton. I'll be right over there." And he snapped off the autorad connection; poured more speed into the whirring powercar.

DUTTON was waiting; had the garage doors open when Kermit nosed his cumbersome vehicle over the threshold. At the front of the small outbuilding a workbench had been cleared and tools laid out in readiness.

"I didn't know what you might want, so I dug up everything I had," the older man grinned.

Kermit's gaze swept the assortment.

"Just the electrical stuff will be all I'll need, sir. You see, I'm going to try to patch up a smashed robot."

"You *what*?"

The younger man nodded grimly.

"I have a theory that whoever killed Sylvia Gaynor was caught in the act by a household automaton. To keep from having his identity disclosed by this robot, the murderer smashed it."

"Sure, Tim. But that second robot claims it was you—"

Kermit balled his fists.

"I know. The second robot accused me. But that accusation was false."

"Robots can't lie, Tim!"

"They can be fooled," Kermit answered tersely.

"Fooled—?"

"Yes. It's my guess that the killer did his stuff and could have got away without leaving a trace; but he wanted to frame *me* for the crime."

Loreen Lane came forward.

"How could anyone frame you with the second robot's testimony, Tim darling? It sounds so utterly, hopelessly impossible!"

"It could have been done very easily, my sweet," Kermit said. "After murdering Sylvia, *the killer could have disguised himself to resemble me*. Then he summoned the second robot and allowed it to watch the first one being destroyed."

"You mean—"

"I mean the murderer maliciously gave that second robot a phony visio-impression. Permitted its selenium 'eyes' to record a counterfeit scene so that later the playback would mistakenly recognize and accuse me. Something like the old motion picture technic of a century ago when one actor would 'double' for another."

Loreen's hand flew to her mouth.

"But who'd do a thing like that? And how are you going to nail him?"

"Through the wrecked robot," Kermit said grimly. "I have an idea it was smashed because it witnessed the actual killing. And if I can restore its brain-coil and memory discs to working order, it may name the murderer!" He turned to the workbench. "Excuse me now. I haven't much time."

Loreen and Dutton fell back as Tim Kermit commenced his task. They watched him bringing shattered bits of robot mechanism from the luggage compartment of the spacious powercar; saw him fitting the pieces together as if they were parts of a terrifically complicated jigsaw puzzle. Slowly and laboriously the electrobrain took patchwork shape under his deft fingers; time after time he applied weak current, got no results, shook his head and started all over again. . . .

And then it happened.

AS if from nowhere a scratchy whir sounded. The whir grew shriller and became mushy syllables, metallic, misshapen.

"—my lady is being shot—Q-gun—

she falls on the couch—dead—the man is coming at me—"

Loreen Lane's whisper was almost a quavering moan.

"Tim! It's going to name the murderer! Listen! It's going to name Geoffrey Gaynor!"

Kermit warned her to silence with his outflung hand. The patched electrovox was still blating out its hideous message.

"—is coming at me—with a chair—to strike me—I see his face—he is—"

"No you don't, by God!" a voice roared. Something arced across the garage, smashed into the robot mechanism and again reduced it to shattered wreckage. "I destroyed that damned thing once and I won't let it send me to the lethal chamber now!"

Tim Kermit spun on his heel. His palm clipped Loreen Lane on the shoulder, sent her staggering to the floor in a flurry of pert whipcord skirt and tapered, kicking legs.

"Duck!" he yelled at her. Then: "*Drop that Q-gun, Mr. Dutton! This is one trap you won't get out of!*"

His studio boss was crouched low, a deadly ray-weapon in his fist, its muzzle trained on Kermit's belly.

"Trap, eh?" he panted in a madman's keening, narrow-chilling whine. "Maybe so. But you'll be the meat for bait. Dead meat!"

"Oh, no!" Kermit said quietly. "You'll do no more killing. You see, I've got a headquarters homicide sergeant hidden in the luggage space of that powercar and he's got you covered. His was the voice you thought you heard from the patched robot; the voice that trickled you into making a move that was a full confession of guilt!"

Dutton stared stupidly toward the powercar and saw the homicide detective emerging, guns drawn.

"My God . . . !"

"Yeah, pal," the headquarters man nodded. "You'd better start praying because you're aimed for the cemetery. We've got you dead to rights."

"Y—you can't prove—"

"We've got our proof, Dutton," Tim Kermit said. "You gave yourself away today, in front of the Gaynor residence. You quizzed me about the second robot's accusing testimony; yet at that early hour *no word about that second robot had been released to the newscasters*. So how could you know any of the inside details *unless you had planted the counterfeit scene on the automaton's memory discs yourself?*"

Dutton seemed to shrink within his clothes.

"I—I didn't—I didn't intend—"

"Of course you didn't intend to give yourself away. It was a slip. A bad one. The sergeant and I could figure out the rest of the story between us. Like a lot of other fellows at National Telecasting, you'd been infatuated with Sylvia; you'd been furiously jealous when she married Geoffrey Gaynor. That was your primary motive for murdering her.

"But you thought you could kill two

birds with the same stone. Lately your studio work has slipped—and *I was slated for promotion to your job*. You knew this, so you planned to get revenge on Sylvia by killing her, then put me out of the road by framing me for the murder. You knew Geoffrey Gaynor would prosecute me to the limit if he thought me guilty.

"It was clever, Dutton. Nobody but an old-time televideo theater actor like yourself could have used a disguise make-up so perfect that it would fool a robot into thinking you were myself. But tonight, when you thought a broken electrovox was about to mention your name, fear made you tip your hand—and now you're washed up."

The detective sergeant snicked handcuffs on Dutton's limp wrists. Then he turned to Tim Kermit.

"Thanks for your help, pal. From jailbreak to capture, everything went like clockwork, eh? And now I suppose there'll be a wedding pretty soon." He cast a sly glance at Loreen Lane.

Kermit lifted Loreen to her feet; slipped a protecting arm around her.

"We'll send you an invitation, sergeant," he promised.

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

LAATEST popular myth to go out the window is the well-propagandized thesis of "Nordic superiority." Just to correct the record, Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, the famous physical anthropologist of the Smithsonian Institute, called in 150 top-flight American scientists, members of the National Academy of Science.

Dr. Hrdlicka found, not long skulls and flaxen hair, but wide heads and brunettes. He also exploded the myth of high brows. Contrary to popular belief, the average man of science does not sport a hulging forehead and he is not a screw-loose professor, with oversize head precariously balanced on a stoop-shouldered, reedy body. In fact, the scientists Dr. Hrdlicka studied were full grown and perfectly healthy.

Another widespread fallacy is that a scientific genius must have a huge brain in an oversize skull. A positive sign of inferior intellect is supposed to be a back-sloping forehead.

Dr. Hrdlicka found that seven percent of his scientific aces had just this type of head. The cause of a sloping forehead is generally due to enlarged sinuses over the eyebrows, which makes the skull wider at the base instead of narrower at the top. And even when this slope has resulted from other causes, brainpower doesn't necessarily have to join the rear rank.

IF you've enjoyed the stories in this magazine you might be interested to know that right now you can go to your newsstand and get a copy of the July *Amazing Stories* which features two of the finest stories we've seen in months. "Survivors From 9000 B. C." by Robert Moore Williams is a grand novel, and "The Invincible Crime-Buster" by Henry Gade is about a new kind of superman, who isn't as super as you might think—in some respects! Recommended by *Rep*

Romance of the Elements - - - Cobalt



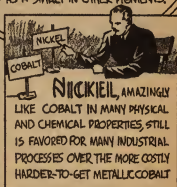
MYTHOLOGICAL SUBTERRANEAN GNOMES OF MEDIAEVAL GERMANY— CALLED KOBALDS —WERE BELIEVED BY THE SIMPLE MINERS TO TAKE UNHOLY DELIGHT IN DESTROYING THEIR WORK...

IT IS NATURAL THAT EARLY SAXON MINERS SHOULD APPLY THE NAME OF "KOBALD" TO THE "WORTHLESS" ORE THEY SOMETIMES FOUND IN PLACE OF THE SILVER THEY WERE DIGGING FOR.



ALTHOUGH IGNORANT OF THE ORE THEY USED ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND TROJAN CRAFTSMEN USED COBALT COMPOUNDS TO TURN OUT BEAUTIFUL BLUE GLASSWARE. IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1735 THAT BRANDT, A SWED, ISOLATED METALLIC COBALT, EXPLAINED ITS PROPERTIES. CERAMISTS STILL USE COBALT COMPOUNDS TO MAKE BLUE GLASS AND PORCELAIN AND AS A SMALT IN OTHER PIGMENTS.

SUPER-MODERN PRODUCTION CUTTING TOOLS LIKE COBALT IN ALLOY: 6% COBALT CONTENT IN 18% TUNGSTEN, 4% CHROMIUM HIGH SPEED STEEL INCREASES TOOL LIFE, MAKES POSSIBLE TODAY'S SPEED PRODUCTION TURNING, BORING AND MILLING IN MACHINE SHOPS. PERMANENT MAGNETS OF STEEL, COBALT ALLOYS AND TUNGSTEN SUPPORT MORE THAN TWICE THEIR OWN WEIGHT. BEFORE 1890, METALLIC COBALT PRODUCTION WAS LIMITED TO MODEST LABORATORY NEEDS.



NICKEL, AMAZINGLY LIKE COBALT IN MANY PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL PROPERTIES, STILL IS FAVORED FOR MANY INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES OVER THE MORE COSTLY HARDER-TO-GET METALLIC COBALT

COBALT is number 27 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Co and its atomic weight is 58.94. It is a metal similar to iron. It usually occurs in combination with arsenic and sulphur. It is used in high speed steel, for tools, and in electroplating, and to some degree in coloring glass. It makes a very strong permanent magnet, and magnetos for ignition purposes in aircraft.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Columbium

Doorway of

It was just an ordinary revolving door in a department store—except for one thing; people went into it, but didn't come out!

by William P. McGivern

MY City Editor hung up the phone and pointed a determined finger at me.

"You're it," he said. "That's the fifteenth call I've had this morning about Barton's Department Store. It would seem something very screwy is going on over there. Check on it and let me know the minute you pick up something that we might blow up into a column. Snap into it."

"Why?" I asked.

"One excellent reason," my editor said with suspicious calm, "is that you are employed by this paper and hope to draw your check next week. Another fine reason is that there might be a story there. I know this latter reason does not appeal to your idealistic nature, but for the sake of the first—scram!"

It is my opinion that editors see too many movies and consequently get to acting like Hollywood thinks an editor ought to act. Which is a sad state of affairs for reporters.

I climbed to my feet, like the wage slave I am.

"What seems to be popping over there?" I asked, starting to leave.



Vanishing Men



The Chief of Police walked confidently through the door—and vanished!

"People," my editor said distinctly, "are disappearing over there."

"Are you kidding?" I asked suspiciously.

The slave driver shook his head. I could tell he was serious.

"That's the report. It might be just a corny gag but I've got a funny hunch it's more serious than that."

I got moving then . . .

TWENTY-TWO minutes later I walked into the office of Brixby Barton, President of the Barton Store. He was a plump, pink, harassed-looking little man with a nervous blink to his eyes. Surrounding him were a half-dozen assorted public-relations men, department heads, complaint managers, etc. Everybody looked plenty serious.

"It's the press, gentlemen," I announced. "Ready to listen, look and tell all."

Barton flushed a deeper shade of pink and tried to smile.

"Now Lansing," he said weakly, "we don't want any wild stories to get started. If you'll just be patient we'll try and give you the facts in the case. Above all we mustn't have any undesirable publicity. Is that perfectly clear?"

I began to feel my story pulse accelerating.

"I won't bother you gentlemen," I smiled, as I backed toward the door. "I'll just peek around on my own and see what's up."

"No you don't," Barton cried unsteadily. He rose from his desk and hurried to my side, panting heavily. "I don't trust you," he said, with something like desperation in his voice. "You'll get your story from us and nothing more. I'm not going to let you start any riot in this city. I carry plenty of advertising with your paper and you'll print what I tell you."

I looked at Barton closely. His eyes were widened with fear and his mouth was twitching uncontrollably.

"You're in a jam," I stated. "Something is decidedly screwy around here and I'll get the story if I have to dynamite this building. If you want to play ball, I'm willing. Give me the straight dope about what's eating you and everybody else in the store and I'll treat you as gently as I can. If you'd rather play the role of Tough Executive, okay. You'll still read the story in tomorrow morning's *News*."

Barton took a deep breath.

"You're quite mistaken," he said with an effort, "if you imagine that something—out of place is going on in my store."

"What about the people disappearing?" I snapped. "Would you call that out of place?"

Barton clapped a hand over his mouth and peered fearfully about the office.

"When did you find out?" he hissed to me.

"Come on," I said irritably, "let's dispense with the question bee. I know, that's enough, isn't it? Do you start cooperating now, or do I get this story in my own prying, snoopy, annoying fashion?"

Barton mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief and turned despairing eyes to the stooges grouped around his desk.

"I—I'll go with Mr. Lansing and show—tell him the story," he said nervously. "We must cooperate with the press, of course. D—don't give out any information on the phone while I'm away, to anyone." He turned then and opened the door. "After you, Mr. Lansing," he said tonelessly.

HE followed me out of the office and led me to the elevators. On the

way down he asked me a funny question.

"Lansing," he said earnestly, "do you believe in—in ghosts or spirits?" He blurted the last two words out as if anxious to get them off his tongue because they were hot.

I looked hard at him.

"Under certain circumstances I might," I answered. "I remember one night believing firmly in the existence of three elephants that had followed me home."

He looked rather unhappy at my answer and nothing more was said until we reached the main floor and were walking toward the main revolving doors. I broke the silence.

"What's the matter with everyone?" I asked, peering about at the clerks and customers. "They all looked scared to death."

"They probably are," Barton said unhappily. He had stopped walking and I saw that we were directly in front of the main entrance to Barton's store. The four-paneled glass revolving doors were not in motion. There was something vaguely disturbing about those doors. It might be, I decided, the odd manner that the sunlight bounced through them. The refraction was at a greater angle than the eye expected and the effect was somehow created that the panels might be out of true, or a bit warped.

Through the door I could see cars whizzing by on State street and knots of pedestrians huddled about in a peculiar manner in front of the entrance to the store.

"LOOK!" Barton suddenly cried in my ear.

I followed his pointing finger and saw that a man was approaching the revolving doors. Barton was staring at him, as if mesmerized.

The man stepped into the door and

shoved the panel, and the door began to revolve.

I saw the man clearly as he stepped into the door. I had been sober for a week. My eyes are good. May Heaven be my judge if I am not stating things accurately.

That man vanished completely in that revolving door.

The door turned slowly and came to a stop, concrete evidence of the energy of the man's shove. But the man had completely disappeared. I could still see the cars whizzing by on State street through the glass panels of the door. The man had stepped into the revolving door from State street, but he had never entered the interior of the store. In some mysterious way he had been blotted up like a dew drop on a June day.

I turned shakily to Barton.

"D—did you see what I think I just saw?" I asked dazedly.

Barton nodded miserably.

"It's been happening all morning," he said dully. "Men, women and children have been vanishing in that revolving door since we opened the store this morning. At first we thought it was some publicity gag some magician might be working. But before we had the doors open ten minutes our complaint department was stormed by wives, fathers, mothers, all yelling their heads off because some relative or friend disappeared in the door. We've sent workmen in to inspect the floor and the mechanism of the door and they've vanished too. It's terrible, absolutely terrible."

"Did you call the police?" I asked.

"Heavens no!" Barton exclaimed.

"I couldn't stand that kind of publicity. It would absolutely ruin me."

I heard a shrill wailing siren in the distance and I smiled at Barton.

"Consider yourself ruined," I said.

"The strong arm of the law will soon be rapping at your door." I shuddered as I said that last word.

I NSTINCTIVELY I glanced toward the revolving door.

"Let's find another exit," I said, "and meet the law when it arrives."

Barton nodded wordlessly and motioned me to follow him. As I turned I noticed a high-domed salesman standing before a ribbon counter which was almost directly in front of the revolving doors. He wore dark, drab clothing and perched on his bony nose were huge horn-rimmed glasses. Why I noticed him I couldn't say. Maybe it was because he was wearing a satisfied smile on his face. The only smile I had seen in the entire store that morning. Naturally it would stand out.

I hurried after Barton. He left the store by a side exit and by the time we walked around to the main entrance on State street, three black police cars were pulling to the curb. I almost swallowed my cud when I saw the Commissioner himself climb out of the first car and stride toward the revolving door.

"Hold it, Commish," I yelled. "Don't go in there."

"Why not?" he bellowed back at me.

I caught up with him and grabbed his arm.

"Funny business is going on inside," I said.

"That's why I'm here," the Commissioner snapped, "we've received about two hundred calls so far from hysterical wives and mothers and fathers. All with the same story. A loved one has disappeared without a trace in the Barton store. What do you know about things here, Lansing?"

"I don't," I said, "except that this revolving door here is a very peculiar piece of business. People go in one side of it, but don't come out the other."

"You—"

"I have not been drinking," I said, beating him to it, "but unless some one explains this thing to me in words of one syllable, every night will be New Year's eve with me from this date onward."

The Commissioner gave me a look of intense disgust.

"I might have known it would be some crackpot crank nonsense," he fumed.

"This deal," I said with great distinctness, "is no nonsense."

"Nonsense," bellowed the Commissioner. "I'll bet you a new hat I'll walk through that door as I've done a dozen times before."

"Don't do it," I pleaded. "You don't know what you're up against."

Without deigning to answer me, he wheeled and strode toward the door. His stout, bluecoated figure was visible for an instant as he shoved the panel, then he was gone. The doors revolved idly, but the Commissioner had disappeared, vanished like a puff of smoke in a breeze.

AN angry, unbelieving exclamation rose from the officers and policemen who had arrived with the commissioner. A few surged forward but I got in front of them and did my best to herd them off.

"Take my word for it," I said desperately to a sergeant, "you can't lick that door. Nobody's returned from it yet and nobody's gotten through yet. Be smart and throw a rope around this section. It's the only thing you can do."

The sergeant hesitated for an instant, then he barked the necessary orders. In a few minutes a rope cordon had been formed, completely blocking off the main entrance of the Barton store.

"This is a terrible thing to happen,"

Barton wailed, "especially on the first day of my big sale."

"Isn't it though?" I murmured.

I hurried back into the store and made my way to the main entrance again. This was where the nub of the mystery was located, I was sure. The doors continued to disturb me. Something was wrong with the light that streamed through them.

I saw the smiling salesman again, too. He was standing in front of his counter, which, it seemed, was doing little business, and gazing at the revolving doors. His smile was more than satisfied. It was fond and proud and paternal all at once. He even shook his head, as if he were admiring something rare and precious, which ordinary mortals could not perceive.

I shook my head and forgot him. I had enough to do to get some sort of a story out of this mess without wasting my time worrying about peculiar salesmen with idiotic smiles adorning their pans.

My eyes flicked about the floor, from counter to counter and noticed the universal worry and fear that was stamped on the faces of the clerks. Fear can grip a crowd and spread from person to person faster than any other emotion. While I was thinking this, a peculiar thought occurred to me. There was funny pattern to this whole thing but I couldn't make any sense out of it. The cogs didn't mesh together. I always ask myself questions; and my eyes were just swinging past the smiling, professor-like salesman when I asked myself the question, "Why?"

Why indeed?

I sauntered across the aisle until I stood beside him. He was certainly harmless enough looking, with thin, stooped shoulders and spindly arms. My little question was still bothering me though.

"Why so happy?" I asked him abruptly.

My voice startled him. He turned suddenly, looking pathetic now instead of happy.

"I—I'm sorry, officer," he stuttered breathlessly, "I—I shouldn't be day dreaming like that, but I just couldn't help it. I—I'm kinda excited."

"Why?" I asked coldly. All I needed was a whip to play Simon Legree. But as long as he thought I was an officer I decided to take advantage of it.

"Oh," he said vaguely, "just because."

"What do you think of the way things have been going around here this morning?" I asked him. I had already given him up as a dead duck.

His eyes brightened.

"Fine," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because," he said happily, "with the main exit closed there's no traffic past my counter. I'm not so busy now. I can take things easy like all the other fellows do." His enormous eyes burned brightly into mine. "It isn't fair for one fellow to be stuck always in the busiest spots with never a chance to take a slow breath. That's why I changed it."

"You changed it?" I asked cautiously.

HE looked down miserably at his shoes.

"I might as well confess," he said unhappily. "I was going to hold out longer than this but I might as well give myself up now as later."

"Give yourself up?" I asked. "What for?"

"I'm responsible," he said earnestly, "for the confusion and mystery surrounding the revolving door at this exit. I didn't hurt anyone, but that

does not mitigate or extenuate my guilt. You may take me into custody."

This is typical Lansing luck. Four million people in Chicago, but I have to pick a crackpot to get suspicious of.

"Forget it, kid," I said. "The excitement's got you down."

"Please, officer," he said, "you've got to believe me. You've simply got to."

I started to turn away but something stopped me. I guess it was the sincerity in the kid's voice.

"Spill," I said, "but make it good. And just to keep the record straight I'm no copper."

"In the first place," the kid said eagerly, "that revolving door really isn't a door at all."

"Oh, oh," I said, backing away, "school's over. Pick up your marbles and go home."

He only smiled.

"It's not a door but a geometrical figure which physicists call a tesseract. A tesseract," he added, "is the visual concept of what we call the fourth dimension."*

"Lovely," I said, "but where does that bring us?"

"That revolving door," he confided in a whisper, "is really a time machine. The principle is my own idea. A tesseract shows us the fourth dimension which is actually time itself. By constructing a tesseract which will turn as this one does, it is possible to bend

the dimensions and time so that a passage may be effected from the third dimension into time. Do you understand?"

I didn't. I didn't have the foggiest notion of what the kid was driving at. So does this sound too silly?—I believed he was handing me the straight dope.

"You did all this," I asked uneasily, "to keep the main flow of traffic away from your counter?"

"Well, why else?" he asked surprised. His burning eyes peered into mine intently. "You don't know what it means to have the time to think and ponder."

I felt very old and helpless. I wanted a drink too.

"Look, Voltaire," I said, "supposing, just supposing everything you say is true. Where are the people who went in that door?"

"They're *there*," he answered readily.

"They're—*where*?" I asked.

"In the door."

"Oh," I said, and studied the floor. Things were getting a bit too deep for me. I wished heartily that I had kept my mouth shut.

"You see," the horn-rimmed wonder said, "those people are in the fourth dimension. Every one of them is instantaneously repeating the action of stepping to the door, slipping into the fourth dimension, stepping to the door, slipping into the fourth dimension, etc. No time passes because they are returned through the fourth dimension to the exact second in time when they stepped to the door in the first place."

"Like chain smoking," I muttered for no reason in the world.

"When they step out of the revolving door," he continued avidly, "they will be under the impression that they merely stepped through the door. Not

* A tesseract is constructed by assuming a point (on paper for a visual concept if you wish) and moving it a short distance so as to form a line. Then the whole line is moved in a plane at right angles to form a square. The square surface thus achieved (which is where you'll have to leave your paper) is in turn moved at right angles through the third dimension. Now, theoretically, the next movement of your resulting figure, which is a cube, is at right angles to all lines of the cube (the fourth dimension) so as to form the figure in question, a tesseract. This figure, purely imaginary, is used to demonstrate that unknown place called the "fourth dimension."—Ed.

one of them will realize that anything unusual has happened to him."

IT was just about this time that Barton pulled up beside us, wringing his hands unhappily.

"It's terrible, absolute—"

"Forget it," I said. "Your worries are over. Almost anyway."

"What do you mean?" he said sharply.

I pointed to Hornrims.

"This young man can extricate you from the nasty situation in which you find yourself."

"Oh, thank the Good Lord," Barton breathed fervently.

"I don't see why I should," Hornrims said sulkily.

"What?" Barton demanded hysterically.

Hornrims studied his nails with magnificent nonchalance.

"It will create a great deal of inconvenience for me," he said casually. "All sorts of traffic rushing by again." Hornrims shook his head unenthusiastically. "Not much point to it, really."

Brixby Barton had not attained his present position without the aid of sharp, shrewd bargaining. My respect for the man went up a notch as he tugged thoughtfully at his lower lip.

"Tell you what," he said reluctantly, "since there will be all this business and traffic back when you open the main entrance, I'll do the handsome

thing for you." Mr. Barton beamed broadly, the picture of a man distributing largesse to faithful retainers. "I'll put you on a commission basis so you can take advantage of it."

Hornrims grabbed Mr. Barton's hand and pumped it enthusiastically. He streaked away then and came back in seconds with a ladder under his arms. Like a human squirrel he went up over the rungs and climbed off on top of the revolving doors. I don't know what he did to them, but then I haven't the foggiest idea of what he did to them in the first place. I only know what happened after he got through puttering.

Human beings of every sort and description came pouring through the door, looking like the human version of the exodus from Noah's ark.

Last to emerge was the stout, overcoated figure of the Commissioner. His face was wreathed in a broad, happy smile.

"You can just buy me a hat," he said triumphantly. "I told you I'd walk right through and that's just what I did. I wasn't delayed a second."

"I'll buy the hat," I said, "but doesn't it occur to you that I made pretty good time to get inside the store before you did? You left me standing on the sidewalk y'know?"

The expression on the Commissioner's face was some compensation for the five bucks I spent on his new hat a week later.

FANTASTIC FORECAST?

EVERY one of us know some person who can relate his own—or another's—personal experience in which a dream turned into reality. Insofar as psychology has been able to determine, dreams have no factual basis in life other than serving as an odd outlet for subconscious emotions stored up during a day. However, not the least among those who had dreams that came true was Abraham Lincoln.

It is a fact that several days before his tragic assassination, Lincoln told a friend and his wife of a dream which he had had on the

previous evening. In the dream, he related, he wandered from room to room in the White House, seeing no one, but hearing the sound of sobbing. Finally arriving at the East Room, he saw a crowd of mourners near a bier on which was a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Uniformed soldiers stood guard beside the bier. Lincoln then related that he asked one of the mourners who had died. "The President," the person in the dream answered. "He was killed by an assassin." Less than a week later, the fantasy had become fact!

« « FANTASTIC ODDITIES » »

THE GHOSTLY PASTOR

ONE of the most interesting mosaics in the British Museum is a sample of a Roman design called "Orpheus and the Beasts", and one of the most interesting factors about this mosaic is the fact that it was unearthed in England itself. Behind the unearthing of this ancient section of slab, however, there lies an even more fascinating tale.

It seems that an English country rector happened to accidentally run across fragments of the ancient mosaic while watching the grave-diggers at work in the local churchyard. Being absolutely certain that the pieces of mosaic were authentic and of much scientific value the good rector realized that a thorough digging up of the church graveyard would result in reaching sections of old Roman pavements of which British science had hitherto been unaware. But his task was not as simple as that. Wholesale digging around the churchyard would bring down the wrath of his parish flock, most of whom had ancestors lying in that graveyard, and who would naturally resent such a sacrilegious disturbing of venerated tombs.

Giving careful thought to the matter, the pastor decided that science was more important than parish feelings, and decided to take a daring course to complete his plans. He hired workmen from far-off towns, giving them double wages and swearing them to secrecy. These diggers hid in his rectory by day, and emerged only at night, to dig up the graveyard. To insure his daring scheme against possible betrayal by curious townfolk who might go near the cemetery at night, the pastor clothed himself in sheets and took a position at the gate of the cemetery while the diggers toiled. When any parishioners ventured near the churchyard, the good pastor flapped his sheets, howled hideously, and gave an A-Number-One impersonation of a ghost. Needless to say, his plan worked perfectly!

CIGARETTES IN TECHNICOLOR

IT may not be very long before the smoke that gets in your eyes from your chum's cigarettes will be—colored! Listed in the U. S. Patent Office is a process for treating cigarettes so that they will give off smoke of various striking hues. Female nicotine-ettes will be able to select their favorite brands with an eye to the dress they're wearing or the color of their nails, while gentlemen inhalers will be able to pick up a pack of coffin nails to match the color of the ties or suits they wear!

THE UNAZIED STATES OF AMERICA

IN the heart of Germany, less than four hours from Berlin, there is a little group of villages lying in the Warthe valley, called Midget America. In these strange villages live the descendants of a band of Germans who—when setting out to colonize in America long ago—were forbidden to leave Germany by their then emperor, Frederick The Great. In order to compensate for the harshness of the restriction, and to please his sometimes peculiar sense of humor, Frederick gave these people a sector of land along the Oder. Then, giving all the villages in the sector American names, Frederick said: "There's your America for you."

In this peculiar sector there are signposts bearing names such as New York Road, Maryland Street, Pennsylvania Boulevard, and even a fire-fighting division called the "Volunteer Fire Brigade Of Florida"!

ARE YOU SUPERSTITIOUS AT ALL?

IN Arkansas, John Ingram's barn was struck by lightning. The entire structure and two mules were destroyed. Believing in the axiom that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, Farmer Ingram put up another barn on the same spot. In a little over a month after that, lightning struck the new barn, destroying it and the newly bought mules just as thoroughly as it had the other.

And when General Emilio Mola, one of the leaders in Franco's Spanish forces, was taken from the wreckage of the plane crash that killed him, it was discovered that he was clad in his stocking feet. An officer who knew him well related that General Mola always removed his shoes when entering an airplane, because a Gypsy once told him that he would die with his boots on!

A woman in Madison, Georgia, Mrs. Willmore Trotter Jones, has had a hobby of finding and saving four-leaf clovers for many years. The four-leaf clovers she's picked total in the thousands. In spite of this fact, Mrs. Jones has been in five automobile wrecks, lost three husbands, and been the victim of almost daily minor disasters.

And not so very long ago Mrs. Nelille Colman, a housewife, refused to eat with guests because there would then be thirteen people at the table. She waited until they were finished, then sat down for her own dinner alone. Before she had finished eating, Mrs. Colman was stricken with a fatal heart attack!

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»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR



ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

SOME guys are born to be hanged; others are predestined to a writing career. I'm one of the latter. Ever since I can remember, I've been putting words on paper because I can't help it. But the *kind* of words—action, gunplay, thrills—well, I guess that phase of it was shaped by environment and circumstances.

I recall vividly one occasion when I was a grammar school kid in Philadelphia, my home town, where my dad was a railroad dick. I took him his sandwiches that evening and finally located him out in the freight yards. He spotted me coming; yelled for me to duck the hell out of the way. I wondered why.

I soon found out. From around the end of a freight car a gun blammed: "*Pow!*" and my dad staggered; grabbed at his side. Then he regained his balance! sprinted forward. He vanished on the other side of that freight car. Presently he reappeared with a freight-thief in tow. Dad had a hullet-crease across his ribs. Likewise he had the gun that had done the damage. He also had the trigger artist—and the trigger artist had a hustled jaw. Dad always was handy with his fists.

To me from then on, cops were heroes; guys who fought through to victory with their brains hacked up by knuckles were supermen; they still are. Sometimes I wish I'd followed in the old man's footsteps instead of becoming a newspaper-

man; but the closest I ever came to wearing a badge was down in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

That was in '20 or '21 when Tulsa had its famous race-riot. I was a special deputy for the first twenty-four hours of that nasty affair—until the National Guard took charge. I heard my share of gunfire then; saw my share of sudden death. As a member of the *Tulsa Tribune* staff, some of the pix I snapped of that trouble were used by dailies all over the country.

Fifteen years of newspapering took me to almost as many places as those pictures had gone. Philadelphia, Atlantic City, Miami during the boom, New York, Memphis at flood-time, Albuquerque before it lost its glamour—I hopped from sheet to sheet like a bedbug with the hotfoot. Always gathering and storing experiences; constantly seeking the side of life that wasn't prosaic.

I helped cover Woodrow Wilson's death for Universal Service during one of my tricks in Washington; I can still feel the bitter cold of that last night, with Cary Grayson, the ex-President's personal physician, coming out of the somber Wilson residence on S street every hour to issue his grim reports.

A few doors away there was an excavation for the cellar of what was to be Herbert Hoover's home. All the national wire services had led their lines into that shack; it was headquarters for the correspondents and telegraphers of the death-watch. Somebody hammered a couple of gallon oil-cans flat and made a fire on the resulting crude hearth. That was where we warmed ourselves—and almost hurned the shack to a cinder.

The Long Beach, California, earthquake was another of my high spots. Until the day I traded it, my car hore the dents of falling bricks from a collapsing building; if I hadn't juiced the tripes out of all six cylinders I'd have been a gone goose. Br-r-rr-r!

But it wasn't all as exciting as that. There were years of drama-criticing, literary reviewing and the conducting of a daily column. And other years of selling advertising; of being classified advertising manager for papers large and small. There was a blissful period on the Fresno *Bee* in the hot somnolence of California's San Joaquin Valley; an interval of radio announcing for KPSN; a fling at Hollywood as a movie extra for Universal; and finally the quiet passivity of my last newspaper job on the Pasadena *Star-News*.

(Continued on page 145)

Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself indicated points for each correct answer.

INVENTORS MATCH

Here's a list of inventors and it's your job to try and link them up with the inventions which made them famous. Three points for each correct answer. Give yourself thirty if you hit the nail on the head each time.

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1 Marconi | () Printing |
| 2 Fulton | () Wireless |
| 3 Colt | () Sun motor |
| 4 Whitney | () Sewing machine |
| 5 Ericsson | () Incandescent light |
| 6 Stephens | () Torpedo boat |
| 7 Howe | () Platform scales |
| 8 Edison | () Cotton gin |
| 9 Fairbanks | () Railroad engine |
| 10 Gutenberg | () Revolver |

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

This next might be called a literary workout. Under each of the following well-known bits of poetry you will find the names of three authors. If you pick the correct author it's worth five points to you. Total for this literary gold course is twenty.

"To be or not to be, that is the question."

(1) Shakespeare (2) Chaucer (3) Dickens

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea."

(1) Whittier (2) Gray (3) Longfellow

"Tell me not in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream."

(1) Thackeray (2) Cowper (3) Longfellow

"Once upon a midnight dreary
While I pondered weak and weary."

(1) Browning (2) Poe (3) Bryant

IT'S A LAW!

Here's a really tough one now and because of

that we're giving five points for each correct answer. If you know this one you can boost your score thirty points by breezing through it. It's a famous law of Newton's and if you can fill in the missing words you'll deserve the thirty points.

Every material body draws or attracts every other material body in a force which varies _____ as the product of the _____ of the two _____ and _____ as the _____ of the _____ between them.

TRUE OR FALSE

Give yourself two points for each correct answer on this one.

1. A gallon of boiling water is heavier than a gallon of frozen water.
2. A steel bar is longer at the South pole than at the Equator.
3. A pound of gold is lighter than a pound of feathers.
4. A keg of wine frozen to within two inches of the center contains a two inch pocket of water only.
5. A frozen piece of iron repels a wet surface.
6. Cleveland Abbe was a renowned meteorologist.
7. H. G. Wells was one of the first great fantasy writers.
8. In Grecian mythology, Apollo was called the "Lord of the Silver Bow."
9. Newton dropped apples from a tree and this stirred him to the study of gravitational law.
10. The brilliance of stars is constant.
11. Electric currents are led around paths called trajectories.
12. Sirius is the brightest star in the heavens.
13. Sulphuric acid is an organic acid.
14. The Earth is slowly and gradually losing weight.
15. Spider's webs are an indispensable material for war purposes.

SCIENTISTS MATCH

Match the names of the following scientists with the branch of science with which they are associated. Perfection here is ten. Two points for each correct answer.

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (1) Copernicus | () Medicine |
| (2) Pythagoras | () Astronomy |
| (3) Roemer | () Anthropology |
| (4) J. B. Lamarck | () Zoology |
| (5) Darwin | () Mathematics |

(Answers on page 145)

READER'S PAGE

THANK YOU

Sirs:

Congratulations on going monthly! The best news I've heard in a long time.

The lineup of new stories sounds great: Binder, Schachner, Norman, and even Cummings. I hope "The Druid Girl" is not another version of "The Girl in the Golden Atom."

Best stories in this issue were Wilcox, Binder and McGivern.

L. L. Schwartz,
229 Washington St.,
Dorchester, Mass.

A NEW READER

Sirs:

I do not read magazines very often, because I like books better. The other day at a friend's house, I picked up a copy of your January magazine. I glanced at it, and read a few pages. I became very interested in it, and took it home. I have read every story in it, and I have become a fan of yours.

I thought D. W. O'Brien's *The Floating Robot* was a very thrilling story, one of the best stories I have ever read in a magazine. I enjoyed *The Golden Amazon Returns*, *The Dynamouse*, *The Horse That Talked*, and *The Vanishing Witnesses*. The only story which I did not enjoy was *Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher*. Perhaps that was because it was so short, just ten pages.

I like humor in your stories, too, and *The Dynamouse* was an exceptionally good story.

I have found out your magazine comes out once every two months. Why? Surely this is too long. Why not once each month, or even twice?

Edward H. Holt,
1409 W. 6th,
Little Rock, Ark.

Wrong! FANTASTIC ADVENTURES comes out each month! We began monthly publication with the May issue. And we're glad to welcome you as a new and steady reader. Write us again. We like to know what you think of us.—Ed.

FUQUA COVER LIKED

Sirs:

I just finished the May issue of F.A. The cover by Fuqua is excellent, wonderful, great—the best in a year. I rate the stories as follows: "Land of the Shadow Dragons"—Good, not exceptional; "Three Eyes in the Dark"—very good, let's have

more like it; "The Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek"—you couldn't print what I think of that story. How come you let it take up so much room, and why did McGivern use the name of a radio character? "Moons of Death"—pretty good; "The Man Who Murdered Himself", "The Machine From the Past", and "Mr. Duffy's Other Life" are no good; they're too short.

The best picture *inside* the magazine is the one on page 138, in the ad for the June F.A. The picture for "Three Eyes" is very good, but it doesn't belong in a S.F. mag.

How do you pronounce "Robot"?

Robert Greenberg,
1860 Morris Ave.,
The Bronx,
New York, N. Y.

Robot is pronounced rô-bôt with the accent on the first syllable. The French pronunciation is rô-bôw.—Ed.

ABOUT FACE!

Sirs:

Like most of your other readers, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that you have returned to a monthly basis. Though it is probably asking too much, I wonder whether or not you are going to give us the old size again—but I presume you are *not*. The large size made your book more like a slick, but from your nice little comments on letters I presume you are aiming at the usual pulp level of recent issues.

I do not like the idea of a Cummings feature novel. From the ad on page 138 I'd bet an asteroid it's one of his frequent reshapes of "The Girl In the Golden Atom." Now, none of these reshapes that I've read has even remotely approached "The Girl," etc., or its sequel. But enough of that; let's get to the present issue.

The cover is not so *hot*. You've got Fuqua busy on A.S.; why can't he lay off F.A. and make room for McCauley and St. John? Paul would be appreciated, and, if Stockton Mulford can do something with the power of May, '40, why, let him do it!

"Land Of The Shadow Dragons." A fine story, but I think the Valley life should have been left as such for another sequel. I don't think Binder should have made so much "mystery" out of the loaded plane, because everybody knew in advance it would be the Invisible Robinhood.

"Three Eyes In The Dark." Somehow it went against the grain. First Wilcox tale to do so.

Its picture was rotten too.

"Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek." Great! Best story of the issue. Why don't you run more novel-length humor yarns?

"Moons of Death." Second to McGivern. Good idea, and excellent ending.

"The Man Who Murdered Himself." Carry on, Carson. If the two shorts about him go over, bow about a novelette?

"Machine From The Past." Takes third!

"Mr. Duffy's Other Life." Too bad it was so short—would have made a wonderful novelette.

Special Requests: Bring back Paul. Toss out Fuqua—he belongs only in A.S. More McCauley, St. John, and Mulford (if possible). Give us the old size, and a back cover. And lastly, if you HAVE to have things like "Three Eyes," get Hannes Bok to illustrate 'em. Don't ever give us Magarian again!

Sincerely,

Paul Carter,
156 S. University St.,
Blackfoot, Idaho

Well, this letter reverses everything the preceding one said. We won't try to figure it out, but someone once told us—if you start an argument, you're on the popular side of the road!

Unfortunately, Hannes Bok's illustrations are not suited to our requirements, since he specializes in a distinctly outre and weird type of illustration, too far from the credibility we try to achieve in our illustrations. And too, Magarian has made an instant hit, and his originals frankly aren't safe from visitors to our office unless under lock and key. In fact, Don Wilcox now treasures the very illustration you speak of as his most prized memento.

No, we intend to keep FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in its present convenient format. We might give you an argument about that "pulp level" stuff. Our books are recognized for their quality among both our readers and by our authors. Ask any one of 'em, if you doubt us. Good writing is found more frequently in the so-called pulps than it is in the slicks.—Ed.

DON WILCOX SCORES

Sirs:

It seems that a sequel is never as good as the original story. So it is with the second Invisible Robinhood adventure. The story was good, however, but not up to the level of the first one.

And while on the subject, can't Robert Fuqua read? I refer to his cover. Now don't tell me that overdrawn tin can is an airplane. At that, an airplane that could take to the air again? Not that junk beap. And why is the pilot all dressed up like a Nazi soldier? I give up—completely.

The best story in the issue is Don Wilcox's "Three Eyes in the Dark." I have yet to read a poor story by him. In the illustration, Magarian shows promise.

McGivern's story of Mortimer Meek hasn't a new plot, but in the way it was told made fast

and enjoyable reading. Jackson's drawings were clever and appropriate for this type of story.

"Moons of Death" was pure science fiction and had no place in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. But even then it was a good story. So, you're excused this time.

Which about winds up the May issue. Except for the "fillers." All were fair, but Farnsworth's yarn leads the others by a fair margin.

David Glazer,
12 Fowler St.,
Dorchester, Mass.

There's a story behind that Fuqua cover. Originally painted, it looked like an ordinary aviation cover. So we changed the plane to a more futuristic model, made it look as though it had crashed (as the story has it) and gave the pilot a uniform, which also is futuristic and not Nazi. We've looked at some Nazi uniforms and we don't quite see how you can compare them.

Yes, Don Wilcox keeps pretty high in quality. We're glad you think so, too!—Ed.

"SURE IS OK"

Sirs:

I have just finished reading your May, 1941 issue and I must say it sure is ok.

Sometime ago I wrote your companion magazine *Amazing Stories*, and now I just couldn't help writing you.

I sure enjoyed the return of Robinhood, and "Moons of Death" by Mr. Reed tied it closely.

When I read in The Editor's Notebook that *Fantastic* was to be published monthly, I sure was glad because good things should come often.



"A good polish and he'll never know my ancestors came from a scrap metal heap!"

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lutely a super-duper. I am glad it was not made any longer. Let's have some more stories of the same type by the same author.

Marty Kenyon,
230 Huntley Rd.,
Woodmere, Long Island

Norman won't give us any more Zombies, Marty. But as for Oscar, he's even got Adam Link beat for popularity!—Ed.

GINGER'S BACK!

Sirs:

Just finished reading Don Wilcox's "Three Eyes In The Dark" and found it a GRAND story . . . do give us a sequel to it.

All in all, the May issue of *Fantastic Adventures* was one of the best yet.

I mailed you a card complaining of the terrible service your Buffalo agent gives the "Small Town" readers. It's almost impossible to get any of the STF magazines no matter how many times we put in orders for them . . . so can't you do something about it? No wonder there are so few STF readers . . . we get the FIRST issue, then we can seldom get any later copies unless we go in to Buffalo . . . twelve mile drive . . . which is a very pleasant ride in the summer, but so darn rotten with three or four feet of snow on the ground! How about giving us some service? Mr. Anthony, mayor and druggist of O.P. is willing to do all he can—which is to ORDER the magazines and wait for delivery—which he DOESN'T get!

Thanks for giving us a monthly issue of F.A. We certainly appreciate it! And the BIG issue of *Amazing* was TOPS! I haven't a single complaint to make against the magazines. They are both still my FAVORITES.

Mr. Ahearn—Krupa happens to be a VERY good artist, but if you have an idea you can do better, why don't you send in your ATTEMPTS? You might find your figures extremely POOR in comparison! But then NO ONE can PLEASE EVERYBODY, so why try? Only—I do HATE "chronic" fault finders.

Why not make a list of the GOOD points in a STF mag and one of the BAD points (if you can find any) then compare the lists? You'll soon see that the good outmarks the bad—at the small price of twenty cents!

By the way—I think McCauley is good, too. As for FAVORITES—well, PAUL for me, but then again we can't ALL like the same people. Besides I don't think I'd care to have every woman MAD about MY husband!

Again—best wishes to the best reading of the month,

Ginger Zwick,
Just-A-Mere-Farm,
Box 284,
Orchard Park, N. Y.

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certainly don't want you walking miles through the snow and slush to get our magazine—although we're flattered to think you would—Ed.

GOING MONTHLY MADE A HIT!

Sirs:

I have been reading *Fantastic Adventures* and *Amazing Stories* for quite some time, and I think they are both grand. First, let's comment on the art department: January's front cover by McCauley was super-terrific, let's have more like it. As most of your other readers, I, too, would like to see Paul do a front cover.

As for the inside drawings, keep KRUPA doing the swell work. The more of him the better we readers like it. Fuqua is a genius at certain kinds of drawings but on others he falls down. Jay Jackson still does the worst stuff in the whole mag. His figures don't look lifelike; however, he pops up with a good one once in a while: *The Secret of the Stone Doll* in the March issue.

Your features are all excellent, the page by ye editor being my favorite.

As for the actual stories, they are swell. Don Wilcox has hit a winning streak with two swell stories, namely, *The Secret of the Stone Doll* and *Three Eyes in the Dark*. I enjoy McGilvern's humor stories very much, but keep him on them and not the serious stuff. Blinder's *Invisible Robinhood* story was tops in the May issue along with Wilcox's novelet. I enjoy a good long story once in a while. How about it, ye ed?

I suppose we're all looking forward to "Oscar" and the new Burroughs' novel, but in between let's have some more of those swell short stories by Cabot and Norman. Keep up the swell work.

Alden Verity,
Beverly Hills, Calif.

P.S.: *Fantastic's* coming out monthly is the most wonderful thing that ever happened.

How about "*The Return of Circe*" in our next issue? That's the longest complete story we've printed to date. How's that for complying with requests?—Ed.

YES, SERVICE IT IS! AT YOUR COMMAND!

Sirs:

The biggest news I have heard in s.f. since the start of F.A. was the announcement that your mag. is going monthly.

Last month I wrote to A.S. and my only objections were that there were not enough cartoons and F.A. was not monthly. Now A.S. has more cartoons and F.A. is going monthly. Boy, I call that service!

Before I forget (as if I could), your cover was the best on any *FANTASTIC* yet. It was superb.

My rating of the stories is:

- 1—"Land of the Shadow Dragons"
- 2—"The Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek"
- 3—"Three Eyes in the Dark"
- 4—"Moon of Death"

5—"The Machine from the Past."

6—"Mr. Duffy's Other Life."

7—"The Man Who Murdered Himself."

Please keep your stories pure fantasy.

P.S.: I am not in favor of trimmed edges.

Toby Kavanaugh,
227 So. Ashland Ave.,
Lexington, Ky.

Look! A reader who doesn't want trimmed edges!—Ed.

MORE ABOUT PHOENICIANS

Sirs:

At the bottom of page 43 of the May *Fantastic Adventures*. The little write-up about early explorers seems to prove that the ancient Phoenicians were on this side of the world a long time ago.

Here is something else that might clear things up a little. I have a book here called "ATLANTIS: THE ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD." It says that the Phoenicians got the alphabet from the Mayas. Here is a line or two from the bottom of page 222 of this book:

"We have seen in the table of alphabets that in every language, from our own day to the time of the Phoenicians 'o' has been represented by a circle or a circle within a circle. Now, where did the Phoenicians get it? Clearly, from the Mayas."

We got most of our alphabet from the Phoenicians and it looks like they got the general idea from the Mayas.

Harold Leaman,
216 Meridan St.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

THE MAC GIRL

Sirs:

Have just finished reading the June issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. Undoubtedly you have here the finest imaginative fiction magazine on the market. I have never read your magazine before, but when I saw the June cover, with that perfectly magnificent fantastic painting of the Druid girl on the huge bird, I simply had to buy it. And to my amazement I found that here was a magazine with stories as fine, both in entertainment value and in quality of writing, as any magazine I've read, and I read quite a few slicks each month.

How do you get such polished writers? Certainly they could write for better-paying markets!

I notice you call the girl on the cover the "Mac Girl." Have there been other paintings featuring her—are there to be more?

Many thanks to you and to Chance, for introducing me to a diet of grand relaxation. Keep it up!

L. Warren Hazlip,
12 North Parkway,
Portage, Wisconsin.

Yes, our January cover featured a "Mac Girl" and our cover in this issue does likewise.—Ed.

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EUREKA!

Sirs:

Eureka! At last Fantastic Adventures has come through with a tale that equals Eando Binder's unforgettable "Little People." In fact, the ultimate has been reached in the way of fantasies. The story which causes this outburst is "Secret of the Stone Doll" by Don Wilcox. Remember "When the Moon Died" way back in August, 1939? Right then and there, I was positive that Don Wilcox was one of fantasy's finest writers. "Secret of the Stone Doll" proves it. Wilcox took the difficult situation of human emotion and handled it masterfully. Any one who has written with any degree of success knows that it is only human that the weaker sex must be brought into the story. But also one knows that any slight overplay of this part of the story could turn a masterpiece into just so many pieces of paper. Don Wilcox had the right amount handled in the right way. I am afraid that Mr. Wilcox will "graduate" into higher fields,—but that is—"Vling-gaff!" Truly FANTASTIC ADVENTURES has published its best story to date. It will be one of the best yarns of 1941 and will long be remembered in years to come.

A novel that would ordinarily capture all first place honors in any issue except this one is "Slaves of the Fish Men." This is Burroughs at his inimitable best. I'll be looking forward with eager anticipation to the next Carson of Venus.

He came for a second visit. Who, Uncle John? Heck no, somebody we enjoy dropped in. Why Oscar, the guy with the sensitive nose, of course. The lovable little character returned to mop up

a mess of zombies. Tell Norman to give us Oscar in something else besides his detective capacity. A change would help Oscar's sensitive smell. (Very subtle hint there.) Anyways, the latchkey is out for Oscar anytime. "Beyond the Time Door" draws the fourth place, closely followed by "Adopted Son of the Stars." Neither O'Brien or McGivern were up to their hilarious best. "Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock" brings back memories of Thornton Ayre, who is a past master at these scientific mysteries. Farnsworth shows promise, however so don't discard him as a bad egg.

Don't use J. Allen St. John so much, for several people have told me that he has a style which they easily tire of. Don't overuse this fine artist. The cover for this FA isn't as good as the other St. Johns that have been done for AMAZING and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. The interiors by St. John were good this time, but Krupa's two had him beat. In fact Krupa's drawing for "25th Century Sherlock" is one of the best I've had the pleasure to gaze upon for a long time. Use Krupa more than you do, willya?

Harry Jenkins,
2409 Santee Ave.,
Columbia, S. Carolina.

Oscar comes back in our August issue. We think you'll like his new adventure—out west! Glad to see Wilcox coming through so well with his fantasy effort.—Ed.

CONCERNING ZOMBIES

Sirs:

Except for the fact that every so often you find in FANTASTIC a story that I term mushy love tripe, I do enjoy reading your magazine. I do understand that love interest keeps a story alive, but it certainly should not drown the rest of the plot.

In the March issue I liked Burroughs' novel by far the best. In second place "Beyond the Time Door" by O'Brien. Third I believe "Death Walks in Washington."

Concerning Norman's zombies in the above mentioned story, may I add a few facts with which I am acquainted.

There is in the tropics, particularly in Central America and the islands thereabouts, growing a species of cactus of which the juice, or perhaps you would call it the elixir, has the most interesting property. When some of this juice is administered to a person, he loses his will power. So complete is the loss of ego, self control, that the victim could very well indeed die if he were not commanded to eat.

These are the zombies as I have heard of them. Also might I mention that even the slightest amount of salt will counteract the above condition completely.

I am not one to scoff at black magic or the supernatural because too little is known about them. But the zombies I speak of are not a

supernatural manifestation.

Robert Byrde,
929 Pine Street,
San Francisco, Cal.

Thanks for your comments on zombies. We're always glad to pass information on to our readers from those who have had experience, or knowledge, that we have not.—Ed.

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 137)

INVENTORS MATCH

10—1—5—7—8—2—9—4—6—3

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

- (1) Shakespeare (2) Gray (3) Longfellow
(4) Poe

IT'S A LAW!

- (1) directly (2) masses (3) bodies (4) inversely
(5) square (6) distance

TRUE OR FALSE

- (1) False (2) False (3) True (4) False
(5) False (6) True (7) True (8) True (9) False
(10) False (11) False (12) True (13) False (14) False (15) True.

SCIENTISTS MATCH

4—1—5—4—2

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Walter Tevis, 13 yrs., 700 Franklin Ave., Lexington, Ky., would like to buy old SF magazines; send list . . . Mrs. Dolores Lapi, 515 82nd St., North Bergen, N. J., wishes to correspond with anyone, anywhere, and will answer all letters immediately . . . Pvt. Samuel Bernstein, 18 yrs., 67th Materiel Squadron, Elgin Field, Valparaiso, Fla., would like pen pals from all over the world between 17 and 19, interested in aviation, baseball and science fiction . . . Louise Holbrook, 71 St. Stephens Ave., Keasbey, N. J., would like to correspond with skating fans and those interested in bowling, photography, stamp collecting and trading stickers from different skating rinks . . . Abraham Oshinsky is interested in contacting amateur astronomers who would like to join the International Astronomical Society . . . Robert Hageman, Jr., 18 yrs., Sanborn, Minn., would like to communicate with those interested in exchanging U. S. and foreign issues (stamp collecting); also will sell back issues of *AMAZING STORIES* cheap . . . S. M. Ritter, 1160 Simpson St., N. Y. C., has a list of about 30 magazines to trade for 1941 issues . . . Louis Kopeny, 2240 N. Kilpatrick Ave., Chicago, Ill., would like to hear from anyone of either sex about 15 yrs.; preferably from outside Illinois . . . Nat Silberstein, 1826 Trafalgar Pl., Bronx, N. Y., is desirous of buying, swapping and corresponding with

"nature" and "pet" fans over 14 yrs. . . C. Hildley, 2541 Aqueduct Ave., N. Y. C., wants to buy perfect, inexpensive pre-1936 magazines; send price lists . . . R. John Gruebner, 2306-N. 40th St., Milwaukee, Wisc., would like to hear from anyone around 14-16 yrs. interested in joining a science fiction club in Milwaukee . . . Jerry Gordon, 288 W. 92nd St., N. Y. C., will sell to highest bidder H. G. Wells "The World Set Free"; good condition . . . William E. Shaw, Jr., Route No. 1, Box 266, Rocky Mount, N. C., desires correspondents from all over the world, either sex, any age . . . Everett Robertson, 1140 S. 10th St., Slaton, Tex., would like to obtain the complete "Romance of the Elements" appearing in *AMAZING* . . . Pvt. Weldon W. Robinson, 8th School Squadron A. C., Building 2-325, Chanute Field, Rantoul, Ill., 22 yrs., would like to correspond with boys and girls whose bobbies are outdoor sports, writing letters and stamp collecting . . . Bill E. Galloway, 1114 Bandera Rd., San Antonio, Tex., 20 yrs., wants to communicate with girls about 18 yrs. in foreign countries; he was born in Mexico and can write Spanish . . .

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR

(Concluded from page 136)

Then, at long last, the thing I'd wanted always: a career as a free lance fiction writer.

Seven years I've been at it, now. I've written and sold more than a thousand magazine stories and one novel. I have an office on the eighth floor of a downtown Pasadena office building where I put in eight hours every day. When I'm tired of city life I move down to my desert home in Twenty-nine Palms; spend my spare time exploring the back country and killing rattlesnakes. Once in awhile I go back east—by train, auto or plane. Flying's best—maybe because I once took a short course and learned to handle an OX-5 Travelaire after a fashion. I never quite mastered the art of the three-point landing, though.

About my sole claim to fiction fame is my Hollywood detective character, Dan Turner, who has appeared in every issue of one certain magazine for nearly seven years without a single break. This, and the fact that I seem able to write practically all types of stories with equal facility: adventure, detective, sport, horror, love, confession and even an occasional western. I think I like the adventure stuff best—which is why I'm so thoroughly delighted to appear in the pages of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. This is my first yarn in the magazine, but I hope it won't be my last. The lovely blonde wife of my bosom insists that I try again; who am I to argue?—Robert Leslie Bellem.

(Editor's Note: Mr. Bellem appeared in a great many pulp magazines along with your editor when he was pounding out free-lance fiction, and though we never knew him, we know of him as one boy we used to eye jealously—but not any more! Now we are tickled to see his name in *our* pages!)

1941 1942 1943 1944 1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950

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